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THE ACCULTURATION OF THE

EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWISH

IMMIGRANT IN AMERICA

1880-1920

Samuel Neal Gordon

Thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
Cincinnati
1980

Referee: Professor Robert L. Katz

DIGEST

This thesis is a study of the acculturation of the East-
ern European Jewish immigrant to America between the years 1880
and 1920, as presented through the autobiographies of the immi-
grants themselves. In analyzing these memoirs, emphasis has
been placed on the study of identity development as it relates
to the personality of the Jewish immigrant. The adjustment to
the New World, the abandonment of the Old, and the identity con-
flicts engendered by those experiences are explored.

The first chapter of this thesis outlines the theoretical
concepts of personality formation, identity crisis, and the
socialization process. This model is integrated into the rest
of the thesis which more closely approximates an historical
study with major emphasis placed on the individual experiences
of the immigrants in the acculturation process.

As the immigrant left Europe and came to America, the
stresses of separation from one's home and radical adjustment
to a new society became apparent. Those forces which served to
segregate the immigrant from the new culture and presented the
newcomer with conflicting values and lifestyles are delineated
in this work. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of
religion in the cultural patterns of Eastern European and Ameri-
can Jewish life.

In a similar manner, the eventual acculturation of the
immigrant is observed. Those forces which helped the immigrant
to adjust are detailed. Agents of Americanization included the

substitute family, the landsmanshaftn, the Jewish ghettos, the
Yiddish sub-culture and the socialization influences offered
in the arenas of employment and education. Finally, the rela-
tionships of immigrant parents to their Americanized children
are considered. The tensions and stresses between generations
divided by culture are recurrent themes in the immigrant auto-
biographies.

Through a study of memoirs, I have tried to show the emo-
tional impact on the individual immigrants of a mass movement
of humanity understood historically. It is the personal effect
of the immigration process that is described in this thesis.

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Acknowledgments

This thesis owes its inspiration to Dr. Jacob R. Marcus who presented to me the idea of the problems of immigration. His aid in pointing out the works of numerous immigrant authors has been invaluable. Dr. Robert L. Katz, my thesis advisor, provided a much needed guiding hand in the use of psychological and sociological studies. In addition, his advice and encouragement, as well as his valued editorial comments, ensured the success of this work.

I would also like to thank Dr. Abraham Peck and the staff of the American Jewish Archives for the time they took to help me in my research. I would like, as well, to express my gratitude to the staff of the Klau Library.

This thesis was possible only through the loving support and understanding offered by my wife, Patty, who suffered with me and who, I hope, will share in any accomplishments I might realize.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of the acculturation of the Eastern European Jewish immigrant to America between the years 1880 and 1920. It concentrates, in particular, on the personal impact of the immigration process on the psychological components of identity and self-definition. This extensive relocation in terms of cultural surroundings naturally affected the lives of those who experienced it. The Jews were separated from home and family, and they faced the problems inherent in adjusting to a new culture and homeland. I hope to be able to demonstrate how this upheaval in individual lives was experienced and its hardships overcome by various immigrants.

The immigrant experience has been previously studied in great detail. This thesis attempts to make use of an interdisciplinary approach which combines concepts from the various social sciences of history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. The diverse studies of this time period and movement can thus be molded into a coherent work documenting the process of immigration.

While the various works of social scientists have greatly influenced this thesis, the primary source for this study was the autobiographical writings of the immigrants themselves. Through their memoirs and autobiographies, both published and unpublished, I have attempted to study the emotional and cultural impact of the immigration process. Be-

cause they were a people uprooted and adrift, the immigrants were subject to emotional stresses and conflicts. As individuals, they often recorded their memories of these hardships and struggles, and I have attempted to gather these writings in this work.

This thesis is therefore dependent on the autobiographies of the immigrants. Erik Erikson has written that "the autobiographies of extraordinary (and extraordinarily self-perceptive) individuals are one source of insight into the development of identity."[1] This thesis uses the memoirs of individuals to gain a better insight into their own identity conflicts as well as the historical movement in which these writers participated. But any analysis based on autobiographical writing faces an inherent problem. These memoirs are often the least objective and accurate reporting of the immigrant experience. Written with nostalgia and hindsight, the memoirs of those who had once been struggling and later achieved success are often more concerned with ultimate accomplishments. They thus lack the insights into the nature of the problems -- as they were encountered during the actual immigration experience -- which I intended to explore.

People who write autobiographies are often those who have made a mark on their age. The published work is even more selective, for the publisher seeks those whose reputations have already been established. The recollections are often romanticized and idealized. While many were able to write with passion about an experience which deeply affected

their lives, objectivity is often lacking. Bitter failures
are seldom inscribed for immortality.

The autobiographies, however, have served as a first-
hand account of immigrant life. With the added insights of
social scientists, an objective study has been possible. I
have been most indebted to the work, Life is with People, an
anthropological study of shtetl* life, by Zborowski and Her-
zog. Erik Erikson's numerous pioneering works in the field
of identity, and particularly in its relation to social
forces, provided a major source for the understanding of the
emotional impact of cultural change and uprooting. Kluck-
hohn and Murray's study of personality and society was of
additional benefit, and Oscar Handlin's many books dealing
with the immigration process provided added insights into
the historical aspects of mass human relocation. Of parti-
cular importance to me was Irving Howe's World of Our Fathers,
a more general social history of Eastern European Jewish im-
migration.

It is my hope that this thesis will offer an understand-
ing of the emotional effects of the immigration process from
its point of origin in Europe to the eventual acculturation
of the alien into the American social fabric. I have tried,
wherever possible, to allow the individual immigrants to speak
for themselves, while, at the same time, I have attempted to

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*Yiddish words appearing in this thesis are transliterated
according to the glossaries in Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo,
How We Lived, pp. 345-348, and Irving Howe, World of Our
Fathers, pp. 683-684.

interpret and analyze these works, thus offering a fuller
understanding of the process of acculturation.

CHAPTER I

THE EFFECTS OF IMMIGRATION

The immigration experience has been studied in great depth and in all its aspects. This thesis is meant to explore the psychological impact of the immigrant experience on the individual Eastern European Jew who came to America between the years 1880 and 1920. In order better to understand the problems of immigration, a brief overview of the nature of identity formation and crisis is given in this chapter. The focus of the entire thesis is also introduced and aspects of the acculturation process are set forth.

A.   Identity Formation

The crucial aspect in any person's psychological make-up is the sense of identity that person has. One's personality and outlook are dependent on one's sense of self and definition of being. Erik Erikson, perhaps the foremost student of identity, has written that "psychological identity is necessary as the anchoring of man's transient existence in the here and the now."[2] The immigrant lived a uniquely transient existence, and the wanderer's sense of ego identity was thus all the more important in order to maintain personal stability in a radically changing environment.

1.   Parental and Family Environment

While identity formation is a continual process occurring throughout a person's life, its most important moment

is in one's early stages of development. It is in youth
that identity is established and confirmed. The experiences
of childhood are therefore primary as the forces which mold
one's personality and outlook. The factors which are crucial
in determining the emotional quality of early development are
naturally those influences which are most central to a child's
experience. Thus it is the parental model and attitude which
leave the most lasting mark, for positive or negative aspects,
on the developing human being. The family constellation, ac-
cording to Kluckhohn and Murray, "is a primary source of per-
sonality styling."[3]

That the child should be dependent on the family for
self-identification and confirmation is hardly surprising,
but when that family ceases to remain as a continuous pre-
sence in one's life, the psychological stress engendered by
this lack of stability can be severe. The immigrant expe-
rience is one of tearing asunder the family unit, and the im-
pact of abandonment is seen in some of the identity conflicts
that the uprooted Jew experienced. Continuity was lost in
one's life when primary sources for identity confirmation
were separated. A crucial aspect of one's sense of self ei-
ther left or was left behind. Erikson wrote that "the fate
of childhood identifications . . . depends on the child's
satisfactory interaction with trustworthy representatives of
a meaningful hierarchy of roles as provided by the genera-
tions living together in some form of family."[4] When the
generations ceased to exist as a family group, one lost the

sense of trust and stability. Between the years 1880 and
1920 an entire society and culture was in transition, and
the individuals and institutions which had once served as
foundations of personality development no longer offered a
feeling of permanence and security.

2. Immediate Community Influences

When the family and the immediate community could no
longer present an insured continuity, a vital support system
could not be counted on, and one's identity could not be as
firmly rooted. In <u>Life History and the Historical Moment</u>,
Erikson wrote:

> Throughout life the establishment and main-
> tenance of that strength which can reconcile
> discontinuities and ambiguities depends on
> the support of parental as well as communal
> models. For youth depends on the ideological
> coherence of the world it is meant to take
> over, and therefore is sensitively aware of
> whether the system is strong enough in its
> traditional form to "confirm" and to be con-
> firmed by the identity process . . . .[5]

Youth in the age of migration could not depend on the "ideo-
logical coherence" of its world, for the system was not strong
but rather was in a continual state of change. The family
and the community lacked the expected cohesiveness that exist-
ed in an earlier age.

3. Cultural and Societal Influences

Yet family and immediate community are not the only in-
fluences on identity. The formation of personality is a

process affected by numerous external forces. The student
of psychological development must investigate the society
and culture which influence the behavior of the developing
youth as well as the expectations and values of the primary
influences on the child. "Personality figures," wrote Kluck-
hohn and Murray, "get their definition only when seen against
the social and cultural background in which they have their
being."[6] Thus it becomes crucial in attempting to under-
stand the individual immigrant to try to comprehend the so-
cial forces and cultural influences that the Jew in Europe
and America experienced.

The external environment of the Eastern European shtetls
and Jewish ghettos of the United States contained group agents
and social forces that profoundly influenced the personali-
ties of their inhabitants. The Jews were members of a strong,
expansive extended family that in many ways encompassed all
members of one's religion. Identity was also influenced by
economic position and educational background. Jewish immi-
grants often identified themselves as a separate ethnic
group. Milton Gordon, in Assimilation in America, observed
that ". . . social classes, though not as precisely bounded
as ethnic groups, also become sources of group identification,
social areas of confinement for primary group relations, and
bearers of particular cultural patterns of behavior."[7] The
immigrant Jews were, at least for awhile, members of one so-
cial class.

Membership in a group can deeply influence one's defini-

tion of self. The Jew belonged to a group made up of several complex sub-groups which were defined ethnically, socially, culturally, and religiously. To some extent these sources of group identity could be transported both in time and space and therefore offered the immigrant vital support systems to accompany an uprooted wanderer. Once divorced from other primary influences on identity, the immigrant naturally emphasized those other cultural and social forces that remained constant throughout the immigration process. Those institutions that were continuous therefore took on added significance in the Eastern European Jew's life.

4. Religion

The one force that offered the greatest potential for continuity was the religious influence inherent in Jewish life. That component of identity was easily carried with a person, for it existed most firmly within the individual and was often independent of the external environment. Jews in Russia or Poland did not identify as Russians or Poles, and they found no confirmation of self within those foreign cultures. The educational system had been closed to them, and the social and cultural influences of Eastern European nations generally bypassed the Jews. Religion took on added meaning, not merely as a belief system but as a nationality and ethnic group reinforced by education and ritual observance within an individual's personality.

Religion, in its own right, is a significant component of a person's identity. Judaism, however, was all the more

important to its members in Eastern Europe due to its multi-faceted purposes. Erikson wrote that ". . . social institutions seem to provide the individual with continuing collective reassurances in regard to such anxieties as have accrued from his infantile past." Yet he emphasized that "there can be no question but that it is organized religion which systematizes and socializes the first and deepest conflict in life . . . ."[8]

The need for systematic reassurances of continuity was most pronounced among people who were without the more traditional and expected affirmations of stability. Having left the home and family, the immigrant Jews found a sense of trust and continuity within the cultural, ethnic, and religious group to which they belonged. Group identity and religious identity thus were able to merge as the two categories both were subsumed under the definition of being a Jew.

Identity was formed within the family in Eastern European shtetls. Romantic nostalgia remained a constant thread running through the memoirs of immigrant writers, but the significance of external forces such as community, culture, and religion took on added importance in identity formation as the other influences were abandoned.

B. Identity Crisis

Psychologists have used the term "identity crisis" to define a particular clinical impairment of an individual. Out of severe conflict one loses a sense of personal sameness and continuity, and as a result the individual faces

identity confusion. Erikson spoke of a loss of "ego iden-
tity," originally taken to be a severe psychological dis-
turbance. "Identity crisis" and "identity confusion" were
terms with specific diagnostic significance generally as-
cribed to the age of adolescence and young adulthood.

It is not my intention to analyze the psychological
make-up of the individual immigrant or to argue that severe
psychological trauma resulted from the migration process.
In the vast majority of cases the Eastern European Jew en-
tering America came through the experience with minimal, if
any, mental scars. I do not wish to prove psychological dam-
age where there is little evidence of such. Rather I use
the term "identity crisis" to designate cultural marginality
and loss of ego integrity. Perhaps through overuse or inap-
propriate terminology, "identity crisis" has been overworked
and thus lost its true meaning, yet the term is useful to the
social scientist attempting to understand the personal results
of social and cultural stress and conflict.

While ego identity is constantly being developed, there
are human experiences which can act as disruptive forces on
individual personality growth. Even in the most stable en-
vironments emotional conflicts occur; when, however, indivi-
duals are experiencing radical changes affecting the nurtur-
ing environment or significant support agents, it is to be
expected that psychological stress is even more likely to be
present. Such emotional conflicts are significant for the
continuing impact they have on one's perceptions and sense

of identity. ". . . every basic conflict of childhood," according to Erikson, "lives on, in some form, in the adult."[9] The identity conflicts inherent in the immigration process lived on in the new American citizen and were transmitted in some form to sons and daughters.

Identity was formed in Eastern Europe. Learned behavior which was appropriate in one's home was suddenly at odds with behavior expected in the New World. America and its cultural environment often shocked an immigrant population accustomed to a small town, slow-paced, friendly atmosphere. Suddenly life changed for the Jew. It was as if not merely a place was abandoned, but even a time. The Eastern European Jew left, at its most advanced, a culture of the early nineteenth century, and, in one boat trip, entered a modern twentieth century world.

1. Separation

In the most personal sense, the immigrant left home when coming to America. Something was left behind which was at the very core of one's personality. The environment in which one had matured, where one's family remained, where one's personal ego definition was formed was abandoned. The impression of that event and its profound nature could not be forgotten. Weinryb wrote, "Immigration is a complicated process. People are separated from familiar surroundings and become strangers in a distant, cruel world . . . ."[10]

Surely, what the immigrant experienced was a culture shock. America was not Eastern Europe; New York was hardly

Belz, Plotzk, or even Kiev. Yet more was in crisis than one's sense of cultural identity. Basic components of a person's definition of self remained on one side of the Atlantic, while the individual immigrant now resided on the other side. It is therefore to be expected that identity problems were a central part of the immigration experience.

2. A Time of Crisis .

Erikson commented that "emigration can be a hard and heartless matter, in terms of what is abandoned in the old country and what is usurped in the new one. Migration means cruel survival in identity terms, too, for the very cataclysms in which millions perish open up new forms of identity to the survivors."[11] What was stressful for the ego was, thus, not merely the separation from the old environment but also the need to try to develop a new identity more in keeping with the new home. There was a point in the life of the uprooted Jew when the wanderer belonged nowhere. The Old World had been rejected, yet the New World was still foreign. Neither Eastern European nor American, the immigrant was not able to identify in cultural terms.

Handlin explained this phenomenon when he wrote, "The immigrants lived in crisis because they were uprooted. In transplantation, while the old roots were sundered, before the new were established, the immigrants existed in an extreme situation. The shock, and the effects of the shock, persisted for many years."[12] This time of transplantation was thus the moment of severe crisis. Identity is dependent

on a feeling that one belongs, that there is some coherence
and mutual reassurance. For the immigrant, who could not
feel that sense of group identity, a potentially destructive
moment in life history had to be bridged.

3. Rapid Change

It was this moment of radical change in self-definition
that might most appropriately fit into the. definition of
identity crisis. Erikson defined the social identity cri-
sis as ". . . a necessary turning point, a crucial moment,
when development must move one way or another, marshalling
resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation."[13]
Certainly what the immigrant was experiencing was that mo-
ment of crisis. Yet it is necessary, as well, to realize
that the historical time period of the immigration movement
was, in its own way, a time of radical change. The indivi-
dual was experiencing personal change but also reacting to
national and world upheavals. Erikson wrote that identity cri-
sis in the individual cannot be separated from contempory cri-
ses in historical development, for ". . . the two help to de-
fine each other and are truly relative to each other."[14]

4. Personality Change

What must be emphasized, however, is the positive growth
that is a potential result of identity crisis. Certainly the
era of immigration'was a critical one, and the individual im-
migrant experience was fraught with emotional conflict; yet
out of a potentially destructive experience was formed a new

identity that permitted fuller integration into the newly
adopted American culture. Conflict results in change which,
in turn, leads to growth. The ultimate unity or wholeness
that is essential to personality results from progressive
change. Kluckhohn and Murray observed that unity of per-
sonality which is found in an individual ". . . is not easi-
ly achieved. It is born out of conflicts and resolutions of
conflicts, the course of life being punctuated by repeated
choices to be made between alternative or opposing precepts,
concepts, needs, goals, loyalties, philosophies, tactics,
or modes of expression."[15]

The immigrant was constantly exposed to situations and
experiences that demanded behavioral choices. Each new de-
cision or reaction that was at odds with earlier action re-
presented a growth in identity. The self-image of the East-
ern European Jew was in a process of change, and, thus, de-
velopment. A new social setting demanded unique responses
and eventually a new individual was forged in the crucible
that was known as "the melting pot."

C. American Identity

If personal identity is, in many ways, dependent on the
external environment, then a radical change in environment
engenders a similar alteration in one's personality. In the
case of the Eastern European Jews, who were in the process
of adjusting to American cultural patterns, the extent of
radical differences found in the new home in relation to
the earlier society quite definitely affected the emotional

growth demanded of the immigrant. American society seemed totally at odds with shtetl life, and the Jew had to adapt.

It is necessary to try to comprehend the contrasts presented by America. Erikson stated that the American, ". . .as the heir of a history of extreme contrasts and abrupt changes, bases his final ego identity on some tentative combination of dynamic polarities such as migratory and sedentary, individualistic and standardized, competitive and co-operative, pious and freethinking, responsible and cynical, etc."[16] Identity definitions based on such contrasts were at odds with the rather rigid definitions and demands with which the Jew had been raised in Europe. Shtetl society was clearly defined and highly structured. Change was gradual, if it came at all, yet suddenly the Jew was an American, and all the former expectations were no longer applicable.

American society was modern society, whereas Eastern Europe was still feudal in the late nineteenth century. In all aspects of life, the Jew was confronted with change. In Identity Youth and Crisis, Erikson wrote that ". . . industrial democracy poses special problems in that it insists on self-made identities ready to grasp many chances and ready to adjust to the changing necessities of booms and busts, of peace and war, of migration and determined sedentary life."[17] The migration from medievalism to modernity demanded reevaluations of who the immigrant was. Personality had to be redefined and reformulated.

What posed particular problems was the lack of support

offered by American society in the difficult attempt to achieve personality growth. In Europe, one's identity was formed in a warm supportive home environment. In America, suddenly, the immigrant was largely alone. Emotional distress was suffered as individuals, and growth was achieved often in isolation. The old country was missed for more reasons than just romantic nostalgia, for Europe had at least contained one's home. America was radically different. "In general," wrote Erikson, "Americans do not experience 'this country' as a 'motherland' in the soft, nostalgic sense of 'the old country.' 'This country' is loved almost bitterly and in a remarkably unromantic and realistic way."[18]

1.   Integration and Acculturation

Eventually the Jewish immigrant learned the new cultural patterns. The wanderer established roots and became adjusted to the once foreign society. The newcomer to America changed radically in his or her behavior, and American society, in its way, changed also in order to accomodate the new arrivals. Acculturation has been defined as "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups."[19] Certainly in the case of the Eastern European Jewish immigrant to America and the native culture encountered here, it can be shown that there existed an active interchange in cultural patterns that continues to this day. The Eastern European Jew both affected and was affected by

American society.

The extent to which acculturation is often a reciprocal process is further emphasized by a working definition of assimilation. The difference between the two terms is vague, but it is helpful to work with both definitions in mind. Assimilation has been described as "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life."[20]

It would be naive to attempt to argue that the American society at large shared equally the experiences and history of the immigrant. The host culture was, without question, the more dominant and thus had a greater impact on the new American than the immigrant ever would have on the native-born. Yet, even in total acculturation, the Jew remained a member of a separate group within the United States' social strata. Certain patterns of behavior endured and often were strengthened in their confrontations with American patterns. Yet, in general, it was the Jew who was forced to adapt to new ways.

2.   The Socialization Process

The Jews changed under the overpowering barrage of new behavior and expectations of the New World. Weinryb commented that immigrants try to modify their ideas, cultural patterns, and institutions, "so as to live in accordance with their own pattern and to create for themselves the kind of

organizations to which they have been accustomed. But the
new environment does not turn out quite according to expec-
tations; it calls for changes and modifications. From this
stem many conflicts affecting the group and the individual."[21]
The scope of the changes that the Jews were forced to make in
their own identities was enormous and shocking. Acceptable,
even exemplary, behavior in Europe was now ridiculed, yet the
immigrant was motivated to change by a desire to become a ci-
tizen of the new land. The immigrant wanted to be an accepted
member of American society. The process of socialization was
therefore seen as an opportunity.

Kluckhohn and Murray noted that ". . . the goal of the
socialization process is the disposition and the ability to
reciprocate and co-operate with members of the society who
are conserving its most valuable patterns as well as with
those who are endeavoring to improve them."[22] No matter how
much bitterness and resentment the immigrant felt at not fit-
ting into American culture, the newly arrived Jew had a great
deal at stake in the attempt to acculturate. The "greenhorn"
wanted to shed those signposts of foreignness and accept the
new identity of the acculturated American.

Old patterns disintegrated under attack from the new so-
ciety. External testaments to shtetl background were often
dropped with little remorse. The kapote and payus were dis-
carded and, with them, often the former last name that was
so glaringly "oriental." Yet other patterns, closer to the
core of individual or group identity, were retained. Himmel-

farb commented that the "Jews came to the United States . . . with an actively positive attitude toward society and community, growing out of their life in their own society and community; and a potentially positive attitude toward government, growing out of a Jewish tradition that affirmed the worth of government and out of their strong feeling for the social and communal. Already civic, they wanted to be citizens."[23]

This positive relationship towards community served the Jews well. They had few dealings with the national governments of their previous host countries, but, within their own shtetls, they had developed highly structured communal organizations. In America the Jews continued their mutual aid associations, the synagogues, free-loan societies and the other institutions that offered the external supports people in crisis so deeply needed.

3. The Ethnic Group

In comparing his own experience as an early immigrant to what confronted the later Eastern European Jews, Abraham Cahan noted that by the later years of the nineteenth century there was a familiar Jewish world in the United States. Unlike the earlier immigrant who found few other Jews living in the large Eastern cities, the newcomers had a relatively easy adjustment to the New World. Cahan further stated that "today's Jewish immigrant has become familiar with American Jewish words and habits from the letters and newspapers from America that he received at home. But we [the earlier immigrants] found few Jews and only a small Jewish world on our

arrival.   The strangeness we felt was much deeper, the lone-
liness much sharper."[24]

The Jewish immigrant was able to adjust to the demands
of American society largely because of the aid offered by oth-
er Jews.   In identity terms, the immigrant, though derided as
a "greenhorn" by coreligionists, was still able to identify
positively as a member of a group already assimilated into the
new culture.   Familiar institutions for education, religion,
and social welfare had already been established in the New
World when the later immigrant arrived.   The Eastern European
was a member of a previously accepted ethnic group which had
made a formidable impact on the social patterns of the United
States and particularly of New York City.

The role of the ethnic group sub-society cannot be over-
emphasized.   According to Milton Gordon, the ethnic group
"serves psychologically as a source of group self-identifi-
cation . . . it provides a patterned network of groups and
institutions which allows an individual to confine his pri-
mary group relationships to his own ethnic group throughout
all the stages of the life cycle . . . it refracts the nation-
al cultural patterns of behavior and values through the prism
of its own cultural heritage."[25]   The fact that Jews could
see a continuity in the pattern of ethnic identity from Old
World to New provided a positive force which counterbalanced
feelings of estrangement and cultural dislocation.

Certainly the Jews already in the United States did not
always greet their recently arrived brothers and sisters with

open arms. The Eastern European Jewish immigrant was often
confronted with ill-disguised contempt by the more enlight-
ened and westernized German Jew and by those Eastern Europeans
who had already begun the assimilation process. The Eastern
European often felt isolated and separate from the "ungreen"
American citizen. Yet the nature of an ethnic identity trans-
ported from Europe to the United States, by and large, served
more to help the integration process for the immigrant than
to hinder it. Weinryb wrote, ". . . while the preceding Jew-
ish group tried to impose its own patterns on the newcomers,
shocking them by their manifestation of superiority, on the
other hand it somehow helped to lessen the 'cultural shock'
by 'explaining' the outside to the newcomers and serving as
'interpreters' between the immigrants and the new social set-
ting."[26]

The "greenhorn" might have felt unwanted and rejected
by the Americanized Jews, yet the group identity that was so
much a part of the Jew's personal self-definition remained a
constant thread which provided coherence and confirmation
during a time of anxiety and alienation. The very basis for
a positive sense of identity, according to Erikson, "depends
on the support which the young individual receives from the
collective sense of identity characterizing the social groups
significant to him: his class, his nation, his culture."[27]

For the Jew, group identity remained more or less con-
stant, thus affording a support system fundamental to iden-
tity growth. The family had been the core institution during

the stage of identity formation which the Jew had experienced
in the Eastern European shtetl. Yet when that family was no
longer present, the ethnic, social, and religious group in
America provided the basis on which to rebuild and modify an
identity more suitable to a new place and a new age. Amid all
the feelings of isolation, the Jew could recognize that he or
she belonged.

4. Compartmentalization

The Jew effectively acculturated into America through
maintaining certain viable behavior patterns developed in
Europe. Other Jews helped to ease the new immigrant into
the society of the United States, yet a certain ingrained
resiliency also aided the newly arrived immigrant. Through
generations of political persecution and social rejection,
the Jews developed an ability to deal creatively with the
contradictory demands of external society and personal in-
tegrity and belief. The Western idea that one could be a
Jew at home and an ethical human being outside the home had
applied, in its own way, to Eastern European society as well.
The Jew used techniques of compartmentalization in order to
cope better with conflicting situations. Kluckhohn and Mur-
ray defined compartmentalization as that behavioral method
by which "the personality adopts habitual strategies in one
area of life that are not carried over to another."[28] This
ability to compartmentalize served the Eastern European Jew
well as the cultural demands of American life proved unten-
able in certain respects. The Jew was able to conform in

some aspects of life while maintaining a valued separation in other areas.

Of particular importance to the immigrant was the lack of role conflict found in the workplace. The Jew often felt lost in the tenements or the social structure of the Lower East Side which was so deeply in conflict with shtetl expectations of privacy and dignity. But, along with religious life, it was the workplace that offered continuity and support. The immigrant laborer was a member of a group. ". . . this proletarian mass," according to Schappes, "built their own labor, fraternal, and political organizations in close cooperation with those of the American working class as a whole, they established their own cultural organs of press, literature, music and theatre, and their own religious as well as secular institutions."[29] The Jewish worker easily felt as one with fellow laborers. It was possible to build an identity on the basis of shared experiences and political ideologies. The workplace, by offering a refuge, was one other institution which helped the Jew integrate.

5. American Society

What the immigrants brought with them in terms of ego supports is crucial to an understanding of their successful acculturation into American society. Vital, as well, in this process, was the impact of the Jewish sub-group that was already established in the New World when the later immigrants arrived. Yet there was something in the very nature of American society in the forty years spanning the turn of the cen-

tury that helped to facilitate the ultimate acculturation
of all immigrant groups.

American society was growing. Economically, the United
States was prospering and expanding. New citizens could be
accomodated in a land seeking new workers and creative
thinkers. This was the "Land of Opportunity" largely because
it sought that which the immigrant had to offer. The culture
was not so highly structured as to be closed to new entrants.
New individuals and groups were welcomed in a nation still
young. In Childhood and Society, Erikson wrote that "status
expresses a different relativity in a more mobile society:
it resembles an escalator more than a platform; it is a
vehicle, rather than a goal."[30] The Eastern European Jew was
offered a place on that escalator, and the environment could
be adjusted to in order eventually to assimilate. The
luftmenshn now had a nation holding out the promise of
stability and a sense of belonging. As one actively sought to
become a citizen of the United States, there was a desire to
submit to basic personality changes in order to fit in.

Conclusion

A study of the personal impact of the immigration process
on the lives of the individual immigrants must focus on the
external components of ego identity and personality forma-
tion. Understanding how the Jews saw themselves in their new
home and their personal transformation depends on a study
of the person and the environment. Erikson used the German
word Umwelt to explain this. He defines Umwelt as "not

merely an environment which surrounds you, but which is also in you."[31] I hope to be able, through this thesis, to understand better that self-encompassing social and cultural sphere.

As one young immigrant wrote:

> . . . the emigration became of the most vital importance to me personally. All the processes of uprooting, transportation, replanting, acclimatization, and development took place in my own soul. I felt the pang, the fear, the wonder, and the joy of it. I can never forget, for I bear the scars.[32]

This thesis is an exploration of the individual immigrants and the impact upon them of the acculturation process. Through their own words, I intend to explain their experiences of the massive cultural change inherent in immigration.

CHAPTER II

JEWISH CULTURE IN EASTERN EUROPE

The immigration experience can be understood only by studying its foundation. The Eastern European Jew, in coming to America, left behind a well-defined culture, and that society had a powerful influence on the thoughts and values of its members. The personality of the immigrant Jew was formed and nurtured within the confines of Eastern European shtetl life. The shtetl, as a cultural influence, would be carried with the immigrant throughout his or her life, and, in many ways, Eastern European values, tempered by newly accepted American ones, would be passed on to the next generation and even beyond. Eastern Europe could be left behind, but the effects of life in the Old World would be brought to the New along with the meager baggage that accompanied the wanderer. Just as the Eastern European Jew brought to the New World the treasured family shabbat candlesticks, so the immigrant kept as well the emotional ties that those candlesticks represented.

A. The Shtetl

The shtetl in Eastern Europe was without question a place of unremitting poverty and political oppression, but it possessed a culture that was deeply etched into the impoverished Jew's sense of self. One's identity was inextricably tied to the powerful cultural force that was Eastern European Jewish life in the nineteenth century. The Eastern European Jews

had, in the words of Margaret Mead, ". . . a living culture, which was essentially all of a piece whether they paid their taxes and marketed in Polish or Ukrainian or Hungarian, or were ruled by Czar or Emperor."[33] This living culture had a lasting impact on the Jew, and it was within this society that a person felt at home.

Ephraim Lisitzky wrote of his own shtetl: "I lived in Slutzk [Russia] during the first eight years of childhood when personality is formed, and the city stamped me with its spirit permanently."[34] When a Jew decided to leave the cultural family of the shtetl, the separation was marked by a painful sense of loss. Uprooting oneself from the security that shtetl life represented fostered the internal scars of grief that accompany other profound personal losses.

The destructive aspects of deracinization would be lessened as the years passed, and more and more Jews left Europe and settled in America. To some extent, the old community would be recreated in the New World, and a sense of belonging to a group could be reawakened. Nonetheless, something central to a person's definition of self was left behind in Europe, and it is that culture which must be understood before the scholar can comprehend that society's children.

As one pores over autobiographies and memoirs, one is struck by the sense of common experience and shared emotions. It does not seem to matter from which small town one's family originated, or which nation now rules it or held dominion over it before. Zborowski and Herzog wrote that "the Jews

of Eastern Europe had one culture, possessing the characteristics that mark a culture: a language, a religion, a set of values, a specific constellation of social mechanisms and institutions, and the feeling of its members that they belong to one group."[35]

That sense of belonging was not easily discarded. Particularly the values that were instilled in the homes, shuls, and heders of the shtetl would remain with the immigrants for the rest of their lives. Many of these values would serve as positive moorings anchoring an otherwise nomadic life. Certain ideas and expectations, however, learned within the insular world of Eastern European towns, would prove ill-suited for a New World with very different expectations of its citizens. The incongruities of immigrant life in America were often caused by reactions that in Eastern Europe would have seemed natural.

The Jewish immigrant was hardly alone in finding it difficult to adjust to a new culture at odds with the world so recently left behind. David Brody, writing about Slavic immigrant steelworkers, noted that many of the health problems that confronted authorities in America were a result of an inability of the immigrant to adjust to what were, at best, strange and absurd demands of the newly adopted culture. Typhoid fever was contracted by those who could not see the need to boil water. Others would go directly to the river to quench their thirst, merely repeating patterns of behavior that would have been natural in the old country.[36]

In many ways, the Jewish immigrant had less of an adjust-
ment to make on arrival in America than members of other eth-
nic groups. In comparison, the Jew came from a more urban
environment. Certainly few Jews were peasants. The shtetl
itself is defined as a small town as opposed to a rural vil-
lage which would be called a dorf.[37] Certain aspects of Amer-
ican life would therefore be less threatening for the arriving
Eastern European Jewish immigrant.

1. Education

Certain shtetl values would, over the generations, prove
crucial in determining the Jew's ultimate success in the new
environment. The emphasis on education, at least for the
male, has been belabored by historians, sociologists and oth-
er students of behavior, but the prestige associated with
scholarship was, without question, a central part of shtetl
society's value system. A people offered few other symbols
of success naturally attached honor to an intangible posses-
sion -- intellectual faculty.

A young immigrant remembered that "one qualification on-
ly could raise a man above his social level, and that was schol-
arship. . . . A poor scholar would be preferred in the mar-
riage market to a rich ignoramus. . . a boy stuffed with learn-
ing was worth more than a girl stuffed with bank notes."[38]
The Jew had little choice. Even the wealthiest members of
this culture were poor in relationship to the non-Jews. Phys-
ical stature could only create more serious problems for the
Jewish male seeking to avoid conscription. Professional life

was closed, and a wanderer could only carry so much in material goods while fleeing from oppression. The one possession that was recognizable yet mobile was education, and the Jews in Europe attached the highest status to its attainment. Learning, wrote Slater, "was essential to the core of the culture."[39]

Education was seen as a social advantage as well as an attribute that brought personal satisfaction. To be a scholar, according to Zborowski and Herzog, was "considered the most desirable career of all. The student is the pride of his family, and more. He brings them honor and joy, and sheds on them the reflected glory of his yikhus."[40]

2. Family Life

Education was thus not merely a personal goal attained for one's own benefit. The honor bestowed upon the scholar was reflected onto the family, and the close circle of relatives was the central institution in the shtetl dweller's life. The warmth of family life offered both a support system and a refuge for downtrodden luftmenshn who might otherwise have found little satisfaction in an oppressive world.

Irving Howe wrote that "it was the ferocious loyalty of the Jews to the idea of the family as they knew it, the family both as locus of experience and as fulfillment of their obligation to perpetuate their line, that enabled them to survive."[41] As the values of the generations changed, that family loyalty might well have become an oppressive burden, but in a culture that offered few outlets for loyalty, the

home was a primary factor in one's life. The inevitable separation of family members that was a part of the emigration process would be a wrenching experience the psychological scars of which would be carried over into the next generation by immigrants who maintained within themselves an emotional loss.

Certain aspects of shtetl family life could survive the journey to the New World, and the home which was the refuge of poor Jews in Eastern Europe could equally be a sanctuary for confused and lonely immigrants in large American cities. To the extent that it was possible, particular values could be transplanted from one culture to another, thus maintaining a visible connection between the Old World and the New when the impact of change might otherwise become overwhelming.

The family offered protection for the shtetl Jew. All family members had a role to play and a model by which to judge their own behavior. While masculine status was attached to learning, the woman was given charge of the home. "The man's area is the shul, as House of Study, as House of Prayer, and as House of Assembly. Here he rules supreme. The woman's area is the home and here she is relative if not absolute ruler."[42]

The woman was in charge of the household's everyday affairs. She maintained the fiscal stability of the home and supervised the raising and education of the children. Her domain was the domestic sphere. Due to the central position of the home in the structure of Eastern European Jewish so-

ciety, this domestic role took on more importance than might
be usually assumed. The matriarch was often the strength of
a family whose emotional foundation was the stability of home-
life in an unstable world. The father, whose life revolved
around the shul or his meagre livelihood, did not assume the
role of family protector. The children were not alone in
their dependence on the mother. Slater observed that the wo-
man in shtetl society also acted "as a buffer against the
world for her sheltered husband."[43]

3. Religion

Family relationships and educational attainments were
both affected by the structure of religious life in Eastern
Europe. The Jew's life was infused with a personal sense of
belief and faith. The rules of behavior were based on the
mitzvot which ordered daily existence. "The world of the
east European Jew was colored throughout by religious emo-
tion . . . ."[44] What a person ate and what one wore, wheth-
er the tallis katon of the men or the sheytl of the women,
were determined by a religious code of ethics accepted and
shared by the members of the shtetl society.

Education was primarily religious education, and the fa-
mily's relationships and activities were likewise dependent
on the structure of faith.   That God commanded a person to
obey the legal injunctions was an accepted fact, and religion
encompassed all aspects of life from the ceremony around birth
to the ritual marking death. Each life cycle event was cele-
brated according to strict laws governing its observance. Re-

ligion offered a much needed structure to those without other moorings. A Jew's God was a personal God whose commands and wishes were clearly spoken. That sense of a vocal God helped to determine the Yiddish culture which was, according to Howe, "a culture of speech. . . ."[45]

Even those who had already rejected the religion of their parents could not disassociate themselves from a culture which was so affected by the religious beliefs of Judaism. Alfred Kazin wrote that his father, a Social Democrat and free thinker who rejected the synagogue, still referred to his son as "my kaddish."[46] The values remained, even long after faith had been lost.

4. Marriage and Love

Life was led according to a highly structured pattern. Outside forces represented potentially dangerous attacks on cultural values. Romantic love had no place in the shtetl society where, if marriages were not made in heaven, the arranged shidduch was at least a close approximation. Morris Raphael Cohen related the often repeated story of parents who, though of "diametrically opposed temperaments," lived together with mutual devotion for sixty-seven years.[47] Arranged marriages were the assumed method of family continuity and only towards the end of the Eastern European cultural life did any alternative become viable.

Romantic love, wrote Howe, "appears during the twilight of the shtetl, when the values of the West have begun to undercut its foundations. . . . In Sholom Aleichem's writings,

romantic love comes to signify the breakup of traditional forms and values."[48] In the era of emigration, arranged marriages continued to occur, but that was not the sole choice. The desire for more personal freedom from the often stifling family control was sometimes manifested in romantic rebellion, and that same rejection of certain family values would lead, as well, to the willingness to uproot oneself and leave cherished ties behind.

Even when the Jews rebelled and rejected the values of Eastern European Jewish culture, learned patterns of behavior would continue to manifest themselves. The family may have been left behind in Europe but the character nurtured within its confines would always accompany the wandering immigrant. Religion would be remembered as well as the value placed on education. These learned attitudes of the shtetl would often be a support to the immigrant, yet other beliefs would prove unsuited to life in America.

5. Relations with Non-Jews

The realities of life in Eastern Europe were often at variance with the social milieu of the United States. The Jew in Eastern Europe had, at best, a limited view of the non-Jew. The non-Jew was a farmer whom the urban Jew would meet in business negotiations at the market. They were two groups which differed in appearance, outlook, and economic roles. The Jew's relationship with non-Jews was that of merchant to peasant.[49] These limited associations were poor preparation for the structure of American society that the

immigrant would soon confront.

M. R. Cohen recalled that "as the majority of Goyim (Gentiles) whom one met in Neshwies were peasants or poor city dwellers, some of them former serfs, few of them literate, the Jews generally regarded them as an inferior race."[50] These prejudices were echoed by anonymous Jews quoted in Life is with People, "We thought they were unfortunate. They had no enjoyment . . . no Sabbath . . . no holidays . . . no fun . . . ."[51] Another Jew remembered that "they'd drink a lot and you couldn't blame them, their lives were so miserable."[52]

The Jewish view of Gentiles in Eastern Europe created problems when transferred to social contacts in the United States. The sense of superiority also seemed incongruous to more objective observers. Cohen wrote that "in later years I had occasion to note the paradox that the Russian Jews, who were themselves poor and horribly persecuted, confidently regarded themselves as the superiors [to the Gentiles they knew], while the more affluent and better educated German and other Jews regarded their fellow citizens as the superiors to be imitated."[53]

B.   Beginnings of Emigration

Life experience in Eastern Europe taught different lessons than those needed to cope with American cultural patterns. Often the cultural transition would be a painful immigrant experience. The social structure of Eastern Europe was closed and oppressive, whereas the relative freedom and

equality found in the United States would prove shocking to those whose reactions seemed valid within their former society. The immigrant was seldom equipped to deal with an open society whose values were at odds with those previously known.

1. Breakdown of Shtetl Society

Mary Antin observed that

> . . . history shows that in all countries where Jews have equal rights with the rest of the people, they lose their fear of secular science and learn how to take their ancient religion with them from century to awakening century, dropping nothing by the way but what their growing spirit has outgrown. In countries where progress is to be bought only at the price of apostasy, they shut themselves up in the synagogues, and raise the wall of extreme separateness between themselves and their Gentile neighbors. There is never a Jewish community without its scholars, but where Jews may not be both intellectuals and Jews, they prefer to remain Jews.[54]

To Eastern European shtetl culture, intrusions from the outside world represented fundamental threats. Even minor excursions into more enlightened knowledge were viewed as inevitable paths to loss of faith. The shtetl could not allow for any loss of authority. By the time the outside world finally did intrude upon the thought of Eastern European Jewry, the breakdown in shtetl culture was already occurring. The enlightenment of Eastern Europe was both a symptom and a cause of the death of the insular shtetl culture.

When Abraham Cahan was sent by his family to the Rabiner

school, an enlightened school where instruction was in Rus-
sian and teachers and students were clean shaven and without
hats, a major change had already occurred within Cahan's fa-
mily. The willingness to reject the old rules in pursuit of
a better education testified to the radical shift in values
that was taking place. According to Cahan, "to send a young-
ster to the Rabiner school could only mean 'to turn him into
a goy.'"[55]

The old culture of Eastern European Jewish life was dis-
integrating. Forces from outside joined with rebellion from
within to create the tension that would lead to a breakdown
of the previously stable social patterns of shtetl life. In
Russia, the relative liberalism of Alexander II's rule was
followed by the oppressive policies of Alexander III. The
partial prosperity that the Jews experienced under Alexander
II was now gone, and instead the Jews confronted a ruler
whose policies were consistently anti-Jewish. Under Alex-
ander III, "neither stability nor peace, well-being nor equal-
ity, was possible for the Jews of Russia."[56]

Economic opportunity ceased to exist. The Jews faced a
pauperization that threatened the well-being of their fami-
lies. The Pale of Settlement, where the Jews were forced to
live, became physically more confining as the land allotted
was shrinking and the population expanding.

Oscar Handlin reported that, "by 1900, in Galicia, where
the situation was extreme, there was a Jewish trader trying
to scratch a living out of every ten peasants, and the aver-

age value of the stocks of these merchants came to some twenty dollars. Clearly there was no room for these people; most of them would have to seek their living in some other fashion. More often now their eyes turned westward."[57]

The village life of the Pale became oppressive. Opportunities for success, or even bare fiscal maintenance, had ceased to exist. The cultural fabric was becoming unraveled by each new tear resulting from hardship. The economy of the Jewish shtetl could not support its members. The population, by necessity, had to disperse.

Many Jews, in countries that would permit it, began to move into the cities. In Warsaw and Lodz a Jewish proletariat began to arise, "though in the main it consisted not of factory workers but of artisans employed in small shops."[58] Abraham Cahan's family, finding shtetl life in Lithuania impossible, moved to Vilna when Cahan was five years old.[59]

The old life with its old value systems and the supports on which the Jews had relied began to deteriorate under economic and social pressures. The structure of shtetl culture could not remain intact when challenged by the forces of social destruction.

According to Irving Howe, as early as the mid-nineteenth century, "the agencies of communal survival were visibly weakening. The rabbis had been seriously challenged; the family had begun to buckle under the weight of alien ideas and economic distress; and no communal solidarity could cope with the growing pauperization."[60]

2. Alternatives

As religion and family failed the Jew in a changing
world, new options presented themselves. Many of the young-
er Jews had been exposed to more modern ideas. The Eastern
European enlightenment found ready support in larger cities
such as Odessa and Kiev. A renaissance of Hebrew and Yiddish
literature provided the Jews with an elite intellectual class
to replace the rebbes who had been worshipped by the previous
generations.

Many young Jews turned towards a hope of a new homeland
in Palestine. As life became unbearable in Eastern Europe,
the concept of a reawakened Jewish state in Palestine inspired
in many Jews a sense of political hope and direction. Through
the organization of the Bund, others chose to work for a so-
cialistic future within Russia itself. They wished to remain
Jews but within a larger nation. Bundists, however, were dis-
missed by Georgi Plekhanov as mere "Seasick Zionists."[61]

Some Jews sought to change Czarist Russia; others decided
to reject Russia for Palestine, while still others chose to
emigrate to America. All three movements were both the re-
sults of and the causes of the disruption and breakdown of
Eastern European Jewish culture. Other eras had been times
of hardship for Jews, but the decay of the social structure,
joined with an awakening cultural and political consciousness,
produced a powerful recognition of just how intolerable was
shtetl life. Each new tragedy would be one further impetus
for radical change.

For many Jews, economic hardship alone was sufficient reason to seek to escape their unhappy life. Mary Antin's family had been prosperous in Russia, but economic troubles developed. When their business could not be salvaged, and financial expectations could not be realized, the Antins decided to try to begin a new life in the United States.[62]

Physical terror accompanied financial disaster. Following the assassination of Alexander II, a pogrom occurred against the Jews of Elisavetgrad. Abraham Cahan remembered that "no one could foresee the tragedy to which it was a prelude. It was to become the first of a series of pogroms leading in turn to the mass migration of Jews to America."[63]

Even the hardened socialists, whose commitment was to changing Russia and overthrowing the Czar, also found emigration necessary although for a different reason. Abraham Cahan attempted to escape from police harassment by moving to a provincial Russian town. In Velizh, he became a teacher and there sought to remain unnoticed following the Czar's assassination, but when the police did interrogate him concerning his revolutionary activities and friends, he recognized that he had no choice but to escape Russia and join the massive march to the United States.[64]

3. The Process of Deracination

It would be a misconception to imagine that the process of emigration was a simple one. Even once the decision was made to migrate to a new land, the journey was not a straight one. Money had to be found, and ties had to be severed. Of-

ten long correspondences would have to cross the ocean to insure that there would be a job and a place to stay waiting for the new arrival. Another common pattern began to appear. Often the father, alone or with the eldest son, would make an initial foray to the United States in order to establish a life and home. Only after attaining some degree of stability would the head of the family send for the wife and children.

The process would be painful. The father might leave for a number of years, perhaps sending back word and money to his family in Eastern Europe, or perhaps not. Some families were abandoned, and even those whose separation was temporary still experienced the disruption of family life. Rose Cohen was a child when her father decided he had to escape from Russia. The experience of his departure was etched in her memory:

> I awoke and saw father leaning over me.
> He wore his heavy overcoat, his hat was
> pulled well over his forehead and a knap-
> sack was strapped across his shoulders.
> Before I had time to say a word he kiss-
> ed me and went to grandmother's bed and
> woke her up. "I am going away, mother."
> She sat up, rubbed her eyes and asked
> in a sleepy voice, "Where?" "To America,"
> father whispered hoarsely.
>
> For a moment there was silence; then
> grandmother uttered a cry that chilled
> my blood. My mother, who sat in a cor-
> ner weeping, went to her and tried to
> comfort her.[65]

Cohen's experience was shared by many others. Ephraim Lisitzky recalled the impact of his own separation from his

father: "I was about seven and a half when my father left
for America, and my days of childhood and youth were spent
in the desolation of orphanhood. My soul thirsted and my
flesh pined for my dead mother and for my father in far-off
exile."[66]

Other children were left alone for shorter periods of
time. Morris Raphael Cohen's family experience was common.
Cohen's father first left Russia for the United States in
1883.[67] In 1887, he returned to his family, intending to
stay in Russia. "But the absence of any opportunity soon
made him change his mind, and a few weeks later he took my
two brothers and left for America."[68]

Once again, the family was left alone. A year or so
later, the father returned from the United States, but again
he left without taking his wife, his daughter, or his son
Morris with him. The family could not help but be affected
by the long absences and infrequent reunions. When the fa-
ther returned, new problems were in evidence. Continuing
his story, Cohen wrote, "My relations with my father were
not on the whole happy, for my strange ways grated on him
after he had lived nearly seven years in America."[69]

Attempts to maintain loving relationships between those
who were separated by culture as well as by distance often
proved hopeless. Many women arrived in America in sheytls
with their young sons in payus and yarmulkes only to be re-
jected by husbands who had long before rejected the archaic
ways of Eastern Europe for the modern habits of the United

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States. But, in many cases, there was little choice. Some-
one had to go ahead to prepare the way for the family. People
who had never ventured outside of their own shtetl suddenly
were forced to travel across a vast ocean to a world that was
as foreign as any imaginable. The enforced separation was with-
out question destructive to the core institution of Eastern Eu-
ropean culture, but the emigrating father often felt that the
family, if it left the shtetl as a unit, could just as easily
be torn asunder by the threats of the New World's unknown en-
vironment.

Even after the pain of his father's rejection, Morris Ra-
phael Cohen came to understand the reasons behind the seeming
abandonment. "In later years," he wrote, "my mother explained
it as due to my father's fears that America would offer little
opportunity for a woman of her talents, and his hope that he
might save enough money by hard work in America to enable him
to return and set up some business in Minsk. Events proved
that his fears were well founded but his hopes vain."[70]

C.   Abandoning the Old World

The Eastern European Jew was already in a process of be-
ing uprooted from the security of his or her culture. The
old environment might remain as a nostalgic longing, but the
path away from the past and into the future had been set.
There was no going back. Even a person, such as Cohen's fa-
ther, whose goal had been to return eventually to Minsk, re-
cognized the reality of nineteenth century Russia and finally
took the rest of the family to the United States to begin a

new life. The decision had been made. The wave of immigra-
tion would be a massive resettlement of humanity altering
cultural patterns and social structures. Migration was a
radical choice made by millions.

Oscar Handlin analyzed the general emigration movement
by writing, ". . . the act of migration was individual. The
very fact that the peasants were leaving was a sign of the
disintegration of the old village ways . . . . It was im-
mensely significant that the first step to the New World,
despite all the hazards involved, was the outcome of a des-
perate individual choice."[71]

The choices would be made at different levels. Most
left with the idea of escape; others longed for new opportu-
nities. Many were fearful of a modern intrusion into their
value system and the results of exposure to a different cul-
ture. The Jews left in massive numbers, but the stories and
rationales are very different. Some were attracted by rela-
tives or friends already established in a certain city, and
some were traveling as if on an adventure.

1. Emigration with Hope

One particular group of great interest was the enlight-
ened politicized Jews. The journey was often a purposeful
quest for a utopian society or perhaps only an opportunity
to fight an old fight on a new battleground. Abraham Cahan
heard about a group of Jewish socialists who decided to go
to America in order to establish communist colonies. These
Jewish socialists were gathering in Brody in Galicia. Cahan

was excited: "America! To go to America! To re-establish the Garden of Eden in that distant land. My spirit soared. All my other plans dissolved. I was for America!"[72]

Cahan thought he was going to be a member of a well organized group that would set off for America with a single purpose, carrying to the New World the enlightened political philosophy of the Old. In Odessa, Kiev, and other Russian cities an organization, Am Olam, the Eternal People, had been established in order to move to America with the solidarity of a great movement.[73] An active and decisive group venture appealed to potential emigrants like Cahan, and he readily joined the organization.

Yet after he was smuggled across the border into Brody, he wrote, "I was bitterly disappointed at not finding more socialists. In fact, in the seething tumult of Brody even some who had considered themselves socialists in their home-towns began to have doubts about the political meaning of their journey to America. Some cared not at all and others, as the result of the pogroms, espoused the spirit of nationalism and became more concerned with what they had to do for the Jewish people than with the establishment of a socialist society."[74]

Cahan, the politicized intellectual, was disillusioned with the lack of social commitment among his fellow emigrants. As he realized that the path he was taking was to separate him from the Russian revolutionaries such as the idealistic Narodniks, Cahan felt a certain sense of loss. His sadness

at the departure from the comfortable life he had known was, of course, not unique. Every emigrant who decided to leave Eastern Europe experienced the wrenching apart of cherished ties, whether to family, shtetl, or even a known hardship. The final act of separation was often the most painful.

2. Separation and Abandonment

Morris Raphael Cohen remembered that "when the time came for us to board the train . . . , I was awakened by my grandfather kissing me good-bye. I was overcome with the keen anguish that never, never would I see him again."[75]

Some beloved friend or cherished relative was always left behind. The Jew, who had been raised in an environment of multi-generational love, suddenly was breaking forever with an older generation too weak, unadventurous, or simply poor to risk the journey to the New World. Emigration was a destructive process in a culture that had instilled tremendous respect for the extended family. Suddenly, the Jewish wanderers were on their own, away from the insular security of parents and grandparents.

Handlin observed that "emigration took the family out of the village. The mere going was disruptive. The struggles of departure and resettlement subjected the household to a severe strain under most trying and most unusual conditions and at the same time deprived it of the counsel and assistance upon which it had traditionally depended. When so many new decisions were to be made, they had to be made alone. That alone distinguished the new family from the old."[76]

A new social group was venturing to a new culture, and along with family and friends who were left behind, an entire environment was also rejected. One's position in society was lost, and one's home was abandoned. It is obvious that not all the Jews of Eastern Europe were willing to redefine the basic structure of their lives. Only certain segments of shtetl society left Eastern Europe.

Phillip Slater wrote, "when it came to emigration, then, it would be the common people and the women who would have the least to lose in terms of status, who would be best adapted to transact successfully the difficulties of the journey, and who would find themselves most at home in the new environment. The knowledge and skills of the learned Jew would be essentially useless unless and until he could be transplanted into a complete new ghetto."[77]

The Jew who felt secure in Eastern Europe was not going to risk all savings and social position on a major unknown move. Luftmenshn could afford the luxury of courageous forays into the unknown in search of possible opportunities. Those who had given up hope for a better life in Eastern Europe were naturally ready to seek a new existence elsewhere. The journey to America presented the potential emigrant with the possibilities of intense hardship and critical threats to life and values. The decision to emigrate was one of courageous resolve without benefit of knowing what truly was waiting at the other end of the journey.

3. Hardships of the Journey

Even the act of emigration itself was treacherous. First to be able to cross the borders of pre-World War I Europe was a task requiring both bravery and enough money for the inevitable bribes for border guards. Each new country presented the wanderers with new experiences that frightened and awed. Even to travel successfully to Hamburg to attain passage on the ships crossing to America seemed a monumental victory, but there were more trials to come.

"The crossing," said Handlin, "immediately subjected the emigrant to a succession of shattering shocks and decisively conditioned the life of every man that survived it."[78] The experience would never be forgotten and seemed, in its way, to seal the decision forever. There could be no turning back once the escape had been made. The knowledge of what lay outside the shtetl could never be ignored, and once the West was discovered the stultifying atmosphere of Eastern Europe would never again satisfy. The old life had finally been rejected, and the Jew realized that this personal decision was shared by countless others.

". . . soon every emigrating Jew moving westward realized he was involved in something more than a personal expedition. Every Jew, even the most ignorant emigrant, came to feel that he was a part of a historic event in the life of the Jewish people. . . ."[79]

Conclusion

A massive cultural transplantation occurred during the

years 1880-1920. An enormous segment of one people decided
to change their environment radically. Just in the nine years
leading up to World War I more than one and a quarter million
Jews left Europe. One-seventh of all the Jews in Europe aban-
doned the land of their birth.[80] The emigrants carried with
them much in the way of emotional ties and learned behavior
patterns. They would enrich their newly adopted culture as
they themselves would seek to escape the memory of their old
life. The effects of Eastern Europe and the process of mi-
gration could never be lost. The personal trauma that oc-
curred during the uprooting experience would always have a
profound impact on the Jews who experienced it.

CHAPTER III

THE IMMIGRANT IN AMERICA:

PEOPLE IN CONFLICT

A. The First Shock

The immigrants had left Europe behind, but the vital
and beloved influences of childhood could never be forgotten.
European soil may have been abandoned at a ·Hamburg dock, but
tastes, values, and life-styles, once internalized, would al-
ways accompany the wanderer. Because of the strong ties with
the Old World, American culture could not be adopted without
pain. Immigration meant both uprooting and resettling which,
in turn, demanded emotional change. Caught between two cul-
tures, a full and accepted member of neither, the immigrant
faced the psychological stresses inherent in confused group
identity and marginality. The wanderer left one continent
for another, one age for a more modern era, a familiar cul-
ture for a society full of conflict and rejection. In their
journey from Europe to the United States, the immigrants ex-
perienced the most extreme of contrasts, but they were not a
group which was well prepared for such radical change.

1. Arrival

Moses Rischin, in his study of New York, The Promised
City, wrote, "The East Europeans landing in New York between
1870 and 1914 arrived with energies spent, nerves frayed, and
purses emptied."[81] The Eastern European Jews who entered New
York harbor were weakened from a harsh journey spent in steer-

age; they felt the abandonment of home and the fear of the

unknown.   Their mental and physical resources had been drained,

and suddenly they faced their first experience of their new

homeland. They were about to be welcomed to the United States.

Their entrance, their door to the future, was to be found at

Castle Garden, and, later, at Ellis Island.[82]

The anarchist, Emma Goldman, remembered:

> The scenes in Castle Garden were appal-
> ling, the atmosphere charged with antago-
> nism and harshness. Nowhere could one see
> a sympathetic official face; there was no
> provision for the comfort of new arrivals,
> the pregnant women and young children.
> The first day on American soil proved a
> violent shock. We were possessed by one
> desire, to escape from the ghastly place.[83]

What Goldman had observed was similarly perceived by

Abraham Cahan in his novel, The Rise of David Levinsky:

> The harsh manner of the immigration offi-
> cers was a grievous surprise to me. As con-
> trasted with the officials of my despotic
> country, those of a republic had been por-
> trayed in my mind as paragons of refinement
> and cordiality. My anticipations were rude-
> ly belied. . . .   These unfriendly voices
> flavored all America with a spirit of icy
> hostility that sent a chill through my very
> soul.[84]

Benjamin Antin experienced the same disillusionment,

only his feelings were tempered with fear. Writing of Castle

Garden, he commented, ". . . unless you have been at Castle

Garden, unless you have been present at one of those mornings

when the cold cruel judgment came: 'You must go back!' --

unless you have seen it and felt it, unless you have shivered

and trembled when the terrible pronouncement came, then you
have never heard the crack of doom."[85]

The change from Castle Garden to Ellis Island was not
necessarily a major improvement as far as the immigrants were
concerned. The nature of the entrance tests alone may have
provided a considerable shock to the confused travelers.
Herded through lines, subjected to physical examinations and
not understanding orders shouted in a foreign tongue, the
dislocated Eastern European felt overwhelmed and helpless un-
der a barrage of frightening experiences and poorly under-
stood and intimidating demands, which were part of the entry
process. Joseph Morgenstern described Ellis Island as
". . . literally a place of tears. Many an immigrant wept in
fear, fear of being sent back."[86]

Irving Howe quoted a journalist of the time who wrote,
"'The day of the emigrants' arrival in New York was the near-
est earthly likeness to the final Day of Judgment, when we
have to prove our fitness to enter Heaven.'"[87] Howe contin-
ued, "No previous difficulties roused such overflowing an-
xiety, sometimes self-destructive panic, as the anticipated
test of Ellis Island."[88]

Yet amid the confusion and disillusionment, there existed
the excitement and expectation of the new home. The immigrant
had finally arrived in America, the fought for goal had been
achieved; a major obstacle in life had been transcended. Do-
ris Hurwit wrote:

As they waited for the ferry which was to

> bring them the short distance to the city,
> Rachel felt again the tug of the umbilical
> cord which was being severed between the
> old world and the new. The hated ship with
> its nausea and dirt was the last tie with
> her home. . . . Instead of pent-up steer-
> age, they would soon be on the sidewalks of
> New York, alone in their togetherness, so
> alone in the strange confusion. . . .[89]

What one person described in the imagery of the Day of
Judgment was seen by another observer through the light of a
rebirth. In either case, the motivating concept was one of
a new beginning, a significant alteration in one's life.
Abraham Cahan's description parallels that of Hurwit:

> The immigrant's arrival in his new home
> is like a second birth to him. Imagine a
> new-born babe in possession of a fully de-
> veloped intellect. Would it ever forget
> its entry into the world? Neither does
> the immigrant ever forget his entry into
> a country which is, to him, a new world
> in the profoundest sense of the term and
> in which he expects to pass the rest of
> his life.[90]

Whether in a state of re-birth or afterlife, the immi-
grant was entering an entirely foreign world with alien val-
ues and unfamiliar expectations. The accustomed rules of
behavior were now changed; the former support systems were
no longer available. The immigrant had entered a new coun-
try and a new era, and the process of integration demanded
new definitions of self and society. A major change in self-
image was necessary.

2. Separation

The new environment called for difficult adjustments,

yet the memory of the old life that had been abandoned con-
tinued to infuse the immigrant's experience with nostalgia,
remorse, and guilt. Central figures in individuals' lives
had been left behind. Not all Eastern European Jews emi-
grated to the New World, and those who did could never di-
vorce themselves from those left on the other side of the
Atlantic.

The immigrants found their separation from home an ex-
perience full of anxiety and emotional conflict. There were
feelings of grief for parents or other close relatives, and
the new American often felt abandoned and alone in an alien
environment. Abraham Cahan remembered:

> Frequently, there were sudden moments
> of agonized longing. At first, every im-
> migrant feels this longing for the old
> home. I suffered more than most green-
> horns. Almost every night my dreams were
> filled with vistas of Vilna or visions of
> my father and my mother, my only little
> brother, my aunt and my uncle and their
> children, my comrades and acquaintances.
> I dreamt of Velizh but more often of Vil-
> na. My heart would be filled with a
> crushing longing.[91]

Cahan's experience was not unique. His longing and loss
were shared by fellow immigrants whose most profound loyalties
continued to be directed towards those who remained in the
shtetls of Poland or Russia. Rose Cohen remembered that after
a week of being in the United States, ". . . still no matter
where I went, what I say, mother and home were always present
in my mind. Often in the happiest moments a pain would rise
in my throat and my eyes burned with the tears held back."[92]

Often the loss engendered by enforced separation acted
as a motivating force in a struggling immigrant's life. One's
efforts were concentrated on achievement of the goal of suc-
cessful integration into the new society, and the memory of
abandoned loved ones spurred on the weary laborer attempting
to reunite a divided family.

This feeling is expressed in Rischin's observation:

> Virtually all immigrants saved to pur-
> chase steamship tickets for loved ones and
> many regularly mailed clothing and food
> parcels to dependent parents, wives, and
> children overseas. The power of home ties
> buoyed up the spirits of immigrants wed-
> ded to the sweatshop and peddler's pack,
> whose precious pennies mounted to sums
> that would unite divided families.[93]

Even those who had no hope of seeing certain loved ones
again maintained their personal commitment to those who re-
mained behind. Family ties had been nurtured throughout a
person's life, and the ocean could never tear asunder emo-
tional loyalties. Even typical child-parent behavior pat-
terns were transported to the United States and maintained
through separate existences. Cahan remembered his continuing
desire to be over protective towards his parents. "I wrote
long letters home but I never complained in them about my
fate. On the contrary, I reported on my work in the factory
and my impressions of America only in glowing terms. I didn't
want my parents to grieve."[94]

Yet the immigrants themselves could not help but grieve.
They had abandoned their homes and, in many ways, their re-

sponsibilities. They had broken the accepted generational patterns expected of them by their society. Alfred Kazin observed, ". . ..it was not poverty that drove my mother so hard; it was loneliness -- some endless bitter brooding over all those left behind, dead or dying or soon to die. . . ."[95] To have been raised with the religious commandment of honoring father and mother, to have witnessed the customs of Yortsayt and shive, to recognize that it was the child's responsibility to bury the parent; and then to abandon those responsibilities and expectations put the immigrant in a position of personal conflict and guilt provoking activity.

Separation was a harsh experience for those raised to expect close, continuous family ties. The process of immigration placed the individual in a situation of stress and conflict. Oscar Handlin noted:

> Emigration took these people out of traditional, accustomed environments and replanted them in strange ground, among strangers, where strange manners prevailed. The customary modes of behavior were no longer adequate, for the problems of life were new and different. with old ties snapped, men faced the enormous compulsion of working out new relationships, new meanings to their lives, often under harsh and hostile circumstances.[96]

New relationships took time, however, and the immigrant seemed more affected by the harsh and hostile environment.

B.   Cultural Conflicts

While an immigrant tried to maintain ties to the Old

World, the demands of the New were ultimately more pressing. The new American wanted desperately to fit in, yet he or she was often shocked by the strange customs and demands of this newly adopted home. Cahan remembered that "in my new homeland all seemed strange and contrary. Everything was different from what it had been at home or in Europe or for that matter in the rest of the world. There were great differences in customs, concepts, tastes."[97]

The immigrants could not help but be shocked by what they saw. The immigrant arrived in the New World with highly developed values and cultural patterns, and American habits seemed to be radically different. Marcus Ravage wrote of the new arrival that "he brings with him a deep-rooted tradition, a system of culture and tastes and habits. . . . And it is this thing -- this entire Old World soul of his -- that comes in conflict with America as soon as he has landed."[98]

1. Family Conflicts

The immigrants quickly realized that this new country demanded radical modifications in their behavior. What previously had been culturally acceptable was now seemingly forbidden. Mary Antin came to America only after her father had already established himself. She recalled:

> Our orientation into American ways be-
> gan with the first step on the new soil.
> My father found occasion to instruct or
> correct us even on the way from the pier
> to Wall Street [in Boston]. . . . He
> told us not to lean out of the windows,
> not to point, and explained the word
> "greenhorn." We did not want to be "green-

horns" and gave the strictest atten-
tion to my father's instructions.[99]

Mary Antin's family pattern was a common one. The fa-
ther left Europe first, earned some money, found a home, and
then sent for the rest of the family. Besides the usual emo-
tional upheavals involved in family separation, the fact that
one member of the family was already "Americanized" caused
innumerable tensions once the separation had ended. Hutchins
Hapgood noted, ". . . the poor woman is deeply shocked, at
her arrival, by the change which a few years have made in the
character of her husband, who had come to America before her
in order to make a fortune."[100]

One member of a family had already begun to adapt to
American ways, and the newly arriving spouse and children
were shocked to witness the transformation that had taken
place. Rose Cohen recalled her first encounter with her fa-
ther in America:

> Father was so changed. I hardly ex-
> pected to find him in his black long
> tailed coat in which he left home. But
> of course yet with his same full grown
> beard and earlocks. Now instead I saw
> a young man with a closely cut beard
> and no sign of earlocks. As I looked
> at him I could scarcely believe my eyes.
> Father had been the most pious Jew in
> our neighborhood. I wondered was it
> true then as Mindle said that "in Amer-
> ica one at once became a libertine"?[101]

America appeared to have radically altered one's loved
ones, and soon, it seemed, the United States would forcibly

change the other immigrants. Americanization began imme-
diately, and it posed conflicts for those confronted with
its force.

2. Religion and Economic Necessity

The exigencies of American society were such that even
the most cherished cultural patterns had to be jettisoned in
order to achieve ultimate integration. Religion had been the
central force in shtetl life, but, when the demands of Jew-
ish observance and ritual were in conflict with American eco-
nomic and social demands, it was the new society which deter-
mined the decisions of most immigrants. Antin wrote of her
father, ". . . being convinced that to hold to the outward
forms of orthodox Judaism was to be hampered in the race for
Americanization, he did not hesitate to order our family life
on unorthodox lines."[102]

Religion could not offer the immigrant what was needed
for American life. Orthodoxy, in its strictest, most obser-
vant sense, was a luxury the struggling Jew could not afford.
The immigrant entered America impoverished and without the
assurance of work. ". . . the immigrant brought with him,"
according to Handlin, "an average of only eight dollars a
head and faced the immediate necessity of finding work to
keep himself and his family alive."[103] Religious commitment
could not compete with poverty's demands.

Another observer noted, "The most serious intrusion in
the lives of immigrant workers was their inability to offset
the erosive influence of their occupations on traditional re-

ligious habits. . . . They were slowly deprived of the
right of Sabbath observance, denied the time for their dai-
ly prayers, and thrust into the world of other experiences."[104]
A materialistic world had little time for the spiritual. The
drive to get ahead overpowered values which had once seemed
permanently instilled in one's very identity. Action came
into conflict with belief, and it was religious faith that
was abandoned.

Even those who remained religious did so with major mo-
difications in their outward behavior. Sidelocks were shorn
and women's wigs were abandoned. When, in 1888, the Eastern
European Jews of New York attempted to hire an orthodox chief
rabbi, their efforts only attested to changes in their own
outlook. Abraham Cahan decided to attend one of Rabbi Jacob
Joseph's sermons, but he most astutely noted the views of
the congregants:

> I surveyed the congregation. Almost
> all around were men dressed in a fine
> American style: pressed suits, starched
> collars, neckties and cuffs, clean-sha-
> ven and spruced up. The rough edges of
> a small Eastern European congregation
> had been replaced with American polish
> and sophistication. They looked upon
> their Chief Rabbi and decided he was a
> greenhorn.[105]

By the later years of massive immigration, abandonment
of religion had become quietly accepted. Kazin was puzzled
". . . that no one around me seemed to take God very serious-
ly. We neither believed nor disbelieved. He was our oldest
habit."[106] A central component of the Eastern European Jew's

identity had undergone profound change in America. That which
had once infused all aspects of life was now abandoned and
with it went a part of an individual's definition of self.

3. Educational Values

Religious values, however, were not the only ones that
were abandoned in America. In shtetl society, status was of-
ten determined by education; in America, more concrete de-
terminants were available. Albert Gordon commented, "Earning
a livelihood necessarily became of primary importance and Jew-
ish study could be engaged in only after working hours or on
the Sabbath. Status in the community was acquired less fre-
quently on the basis of scholarship."[107]

Gordon's observations are reinforced by Philip Slater
who noted:

> . . . the more permeable nature of the
> new society, which both demanded and of-
> fered new occupational roles, upset the
> old balance and made the position of the
> learned Jew somewhat difficult to re-es-
> tablish. The ideal of learning became
> diluted with practicality, so that sta-
> tus went to the doctor or lawyer. The
> brittle patriarchy collapsed.[108]

The old cultural patterns and values did not seem valid
in the United States. Previous expectations could not be
translated to the new reality. America was very different,
and therefore the individual was forced to change and adapt.
The process was often a cause of inner conflict and stress,
yet the nature of American life demanded a new conformity.
The immigrant, in most cases, displayed a remarkable adapta-

bility, yet one could never forget just how different America was. One would never relinquish a sense of awe at the necessary adjustment to the strange environment. Morris Raphael Cohen observed about his new home, "On the inner side of life, the chief characteristic difference was the great intensity and hurry."[109]

It might be added that the immigrant's rush to acculturate was also pursued with the same great intensity and hurry that, according to Cohen, characterized all of American society. Yet no matter how strong the desire, acceptance often proved elusive and difficult to attain.

C. Rejection

1. The Native American

The Eastern European Jew wanted to become an American, yet the pleas to be an accepted member of the adopted society were often rejected. The immigrant was not wanted, and many tried to make the wanderer feel outcast. "In his heart the Yankee proudly feels that he is in fact the only genuine American. Therefore, he holds himself aloof from the others. . . ."[110] The Jewish immigrant was deeply hurt by this aloofness. Less subtle rejection was also experienced, and the new arrivals were embittered by its viciousness. Goldie Stone, in My Caravan of Years, recalled her own entrance into the new homeland:

> We stepped out and looked about us.
> Street urchins regarded us curiously.
> They spoke to us in English and we an-
> swered in Yiddish, and then we heard

one word that etched itself into our
brains with a bitterness and malice,
hard to forgive and harder to forget.
    "Greenhorn." Fingers were pointing
at us from all directions and their
owners were jeering, mocking, rejoicing
at our helplessness.
    The Lady of the Harbor had been kind-
er to us and she was made of bronze.[111]

The Jew may well have been accustomed to not being ac-
cepted by the host country, yet the United States was sup-
posed to be different. Mary Antin, a bit melodramatically,
scolded the snobbish Americans:

Dozens of these men pass under your
eyes every day, my American friend, too
absorbed in their honest affairs to no-
tice the looks of suspicion which you
cast at them, the repugnance with which
you shrink from their touch. You see
them shuffle from door to door with a
basket of spools and buttons, or bend-
ing over the sizzling irons in a base-
ment tailor shop, or rummaging in your
ash can, or moving a pushcart from curb
to curb, at the command of the burly
policeman. "The Jew peddler!" you say,
and dismiss him from your premises and
from your thoughts, never dreaming that
the sordid drama of his days may have
a moral that concerns you.[112]

Mary Antin's statement was infused with bitterness and
resentment. The Jew was often frustrated in the attempt to
fit in and be accepted. That pain which resulted from rejec-
tion did not easily fade from one's memory. Many, while ac-
cepting the economic opportunities of the United States, re-
cognized the social stratification and lack of mobility.

W. H. Auden, in his introduction to Red Ribbon on a
White Horse, wrote:

> . . . in no European country . . . were
> the very poor treated with such a total
> disregard of their human rights. In Eu-
> rope the rich man and the poor man were
> thought of as being two different kinds
> of men, the poor man might be an inferior
> kind but he was a man: but here the poor
> man was not, as such, a man, but a person
> in a state of poverty from which, if he
> were a real man, he would presently extri-
> cate himself.[113]

Auden's judgment may well have been overly harsh, but
the feeling of inferiority, and the subsequent lack of digni-
ty, which resulted from rejection, engendered bitterness and
anger in the minds of many struggling Jewish immigrants.

The most subtle of insults and mistreatments were easily
perceived by those who felt rejected and belittled. Lucy Rob-
ins Lang recalled how her mother was treated by an American
doctor and nurse summoned to her side during labor:

> Despite Mother's outcries, the doctor
> and the nurse paid little attention to her.
> Probably they knew that there was plenty
> of time, but I trembled with exasperation
> at their seeming indifference. Was it be-
> cause we were poor immigrants that they
> treated Mother so callously? Humiliated
> and outraged, I began to weep, and the
> younger children followed my example.[114]

Lucy Robins Lang was not alone in her sensitivity to real
or imagined insults. Those striving to fit in were quick to
recognize the slights and rejections of the already settled
Americans. Alfred Kazin remembered his school and particularly
his teachers:

> It was never learning I associated with
> that school: only the necessity to suc-

ceed, to get ahead of the others in the
daily struggle to "make a good impres-
sion" on our teachers, who grimly, weari-
ly, and often with ill-concealed dis-
taste watched against our relapsing into
the natural savagery they expected of
Brownsville boys.[115]

The immigrant abandoned the old home with its role as
fundamental molder of identity and arrived in a new home,
hoping to be adopted and accepted, confirmed and supported in
the attempt to reformulate personal identity. The destruction
of these hopes by the subsequent rejection thus caused the
most profound form of disappointment. The immigrant sought to
be nurtured in the difficult process of forming an American
identity; instead, the Eastern European was disillusioned.

2. Tensions with German Jews

The Eastern European Jew may indeed have been snubbed by
the native-born American, yet one might question the number
of contacts Lower East Side immigrants had with their Chris-
tian fellow Americans. It was most often the German Jews,
Yahudim, who represented for the immigrants the ideal Ameri-
can, and who acted, as well, as agents barring the doors to
acceptance and integration.[116]

In background, customs, education, and values, the shtetl
Jews were almost completely foreign to their enlightened West-
ern European coreligionists. Whiteman observed, "In their
initial contacts on American soil Jews of different European
backgrounds appeared as strangers among themselves."[117] This
view was similarly reflected by Oscar Handlin when he wrote,

". . . these newcomers were strangers as other immigrants
had been before them -- not much less strangers to the Jews
already settled than to other Americans."[118]

It is not that the Jews were unique in their seemingly
artificial aristocracy. America had always been, and still
is today, concerned with the length of time a person's fami-
ly has had roots in this soil. ". . . social stratification
and class structure," according to Weinryb, "are connected
with arrival date."[119] What was true for the Jews was also
true for American society in general.

Yet there were unique components of the resentment and
distrust felt by the two Jewish groups. The German Jews
were modernists, economically successful, and, most impor-
tantly, accepted members of American society. The German
Jews had been able to fit in, yet, as Handlin understood it,
"the outraged 'German' Jew saw, shuffling down the gangplank,
himself or his father, stripped of the accessories of respec-
tability. This was what he had escaped from, been American-
ized from; he did not like its catching up with him."[120]

Yet the German Jews, no matter how strong their repug-
nance for their East European brothers and sisters, still re-
cognized their responsibilities, and indeed their mutual
self-interest, in aiding these new arrivals in their attempt
to acculturate. Charitable organizations were established
to aid the newly arriving Eastern Europeans, but it was not
with a feeling of total brotherhood that the German Jews
were motivated to help their coreligionists. Whiteman com-

mented that such charitable organizations as the United He-
brew Charities ". . . looked at the immigrants more as clients
than as fellow Jews."[121]

If the United Hebrew Charities looked down on the reci-
pients of its aid, the struggling Jews looked to it with a
similar disdain. Weinryb noted that the Eastern European im-
migrant ". . . generally regarded the [United Hebrew] Chari-
ties as a lifeless machine which was out to degrade him and
force him into Americanization or assimilation rather than to
actually help him."[122]

The insults and rejections were felt in all aspects of
life, not merely in the workings of charitable organizations.
Particularly in the early years of the Eastern European mi-
gration, the employers were by and large German Jews, as
were landlords, teachers, and other symbols of authority and
power. Each feeling of estrangement and isolation caused by
German Jewish rejection in turn led to hurt and resentment.

Abraham Cahan commented:

> It wasn't only the difference in our
> daily language and manner of speaking
> that got in the way. That wouldn't have
> been so bad. It was deeper differences
> in inherited concepts and customs that
> separated us. With the best intentions
> in the world and with gentle hearts they
> unknowingly insulted us.[123]

Cahan was able to recognize the unintentional nature of
the insults. These groups were very different, yet they both
recognized that their mutual successes and failures were in-
extricably bound together. Even if it was only because the

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non-Jewish Americans saw the two groups as the same, the Germans and Russians still depended on one another.

They were forced to see each other as fellow Jews no matter how much each group disliked it. Internally, however, the Germans saw the Russians as foreigners, and the Russians glanced back and beheld, what seemed to them, non-Jews. Glazer and Moynihan noted that ". . . in practice, tone, and theology, the Reform Judaism of the German Jews diverged from the Orthodoxy of the immigrants as much as the beliefs and practices of Southern Baptists differ from those of New England Unitarians."[124]

While the Germans and Eastern Europeans were radically different, the lack of acceptance of the one by the other was painful simply because both groups knew that the other was composed of fellow Jews. To be rejected by American Protestants was not nearly as embittering an experience as the denial of brotherhood by fellow Jews. The Eastern European Jew felt alienated and estranged from the very group with which he or she most deeply wished to identify. The bitterness would last, as testified to in the words of Alfred Kazin when he spoke of the ". . . middle-class Jews, alrightniks, making out 'all right' in the New World, they were still Gentiles to me as they went out into the wide and tree-lined Eastern Parkway."[125] The new immigrants were always subjected to a process of "hazing" if not by German Jews, then by fellow Eastern Europeans. The result of this slow process of integration and acceptance was a feeling of lack of belong-

ing, that somehow America judged harshly those who wished
to join its citizens. America seemed a private club to
which one had to prove moral fitness in order to be granted
membership.

D. Marginality

As the immigrants were denied acceptance by American so-
ciety, they often found it difficult to identify fully with
this cruel culture. America was often viewed with contempt,
a nation of unfeeling strangers, unwilling to open their
doors to their less fortunate fellow humans. The Eastern
European Jews recognized that they had left their old home
and had ceased to belong in that shtetl culture, and yet they
were unable to identify with American society. They felt dis-
located, isolated and estranged.

Ties to the Old World often pulled the immigrant away
from the New. "My longing," recalled Abraham Cahan, "made
my new homeland distasteful to me. It seemed that everything
I encountered was unpleasant."[126] Others who had sought a
Utopian escape from European injustice were equally disillu-
sioned to find an America unable to live up to unrealistic
expectations. Emma Goldman had been raised in a strict, tra-
ditional home where women had been denied any possibility
of equality. There was no escape from family oppression oth-
er than emigration. ". . . I wanted to study, to know life,
to travel. . . . I never would marry for anything but love
. . . . It was really to escape my father's plans for me
that I insisted on going to America."[127]

Nonetheless, Goldman was not able to find her longed for freedom in the United States. She arrived in America and went to live with a sister in Rochester. There she married, but "the venture, like everything else that had happened to me since I had come to America, had proved most disappointing. America, 'the land of the free and the home of the brave' -- what a farce it now seemed to me!"[128]

1. Voluntary Segregation

As a defense, the Eastern European Jews retreated together into small communities. They separated themselves from the mainstream of their city's life and lived in neighborhoods that in many ways reflected the cultural and social patterns of the European shtetl. Albert Gordon wrote of Minneapolis, that it, like most other communities, ". . . gradually saw the development of a form of self-segregation among the East European Jews. . . . Memories associated with the 'old home' required that persons who knew of the places of which the immigrant spoke should be at hand or easily available."[129] The shtetl was recreated on New York's Lower East Side and in the Jewish ghettos of numerous other American cities.

It was not merely the old town which was recreated in the New World. Even European concerns and issues often took precedence over American politics and views. For the Jewish socialists, the political struggles of Russia were of primary concern. "We would assemble every March 13 in New York to memorialize Sofia Perovskaya, Zheliabov, Kibaltchitch, Hesia

Helfman and the others. We would keep their memories fresh in our minds. . . ."[130] It was a long time before one would cease being Russian and begin identifying as an American. Caught between two cultures, feeling confused about commitments, the immigrant lived on the fringe of United States society. America was, as yet, not one's home.

2. Poverty

Even success, if achieved, was difficult to accept when one remembered the lessons learned in Europe. Cahan, the socialist, was confused by American life. "I felt America's freedom every minute. I breathed freer than I had ever breathed before. But all the time I was saying to myself, 'All of this is a capitalist prison.'"[131] Yet even with the sense of freedom and the hoped for social mobility prevalent in the New World, abject poverty denied the Jewish immigrant America's promised success. The Jews worked in sweatshops or at peddling, and only rarely did they see some hope in the future.

Kazin wrote:

> It puzzled me greatly when I came to read in books that Jews are a shrewd people particularly given to commerce and banking, for all the Jews I knew had managed to be an exception to that rule. I grew up with the belief that the natural condition of a Jew was to be a propertyless worker. . . kin to all the workers of the world, dependent entirely on the work of their hands.[132]

The Jewish laborer felt separate from this "Land of Op-

portunity." What one experienced and witnessed on the Lower East Side was unremitting poverty and hardship. Erikson noted, "In youth, ego strength emerges from the mutual confirmation of individual and community. . . ."[133] When, however, the individual is denied that confirmation of personal worth, the reaction may well be a feeling of not belonging, of being an outsider. The immigrant did not feel accepted. Mary Antin felt that the slums in which she lived seemed "a sort of house of detention for poor aliens, where they live on probation till they can show a certificate of good citizenship."[134]

Conclusion

Recognizing that they were not accepted, many immigrants reacted with ill-disguised animosity towards America, American culture, and those fellow Jews who had already become "al-rightniks." Belonging neither to the United States nor to Europe, the immigrant felt a full member of no group. In identity terms, this marginality often meant personal disillusionment and confusion. As time went on, however, the immigrants slowly began to move into the host culture. The early culture shocks, the rejection, and the self-imposed separation were left behind on the inevitable climb to the entrance into the new home.

CHAPTER IV:

THE ROAD TO ACCULTURATION

The Eastern European Jewish immigrant slowly began to
adapt to American culture. In this acculturation process,
the alien was aided by certain communal and social patterns
carried from the Old World. Certain American institutions,
established for the purpose of immigrant socialization, also
performed a valuable task in the integration of the new citi-
zens. Lastly, the immigrants often blended their old insti-
tutions with native American patterns of organization in or-
der to create distinctive Jewish American communal groups.
Thus the immigrants pursued their goal of acculturation not
only with help from American society and fellow Jews, but
also by their own individual effort.

These various institutions profoundly influenced the ac-
culturation of the Eastern European Jew, often by replacing
the closely-knit shtetl family that was abandoned in Europe.
The loneliness of the new homeland could be alleviated in the
warmth and fellowship of lodges, union halls, and small cafes.
The workplace exposed the immigrants to others who shared
their experiences, and the lecture halls and night school
classrooms brought together those with similar aspirations.
The various support systems proved crucial in determining the
ease with which the immigrant Jews were able to settle in the
New World and establish a home in America.

A. The Substitute Family

Primary family ties were severed during the immigration process, and the aliens grieved for their loved ones abandoned in the Old Country. On arrival in America, however, the newcomer was often surprised to find relatives or friends who would ease the process of adaptation. Most immigrants discovered that they were not alone, and new individuals and community groups began to replace those left behind.

The initial shock of the New World was lessened for those whose arrival was welcomed by familiar faces and names. Abraham Cahan commented that "the newcomer today is greeted by countrymen and relatives who precede him in the crossing and who welcome him to the new land with love and friendship. The new homeland is no longer a land of mystery. Millions of letters to the old homeland have spelled out its wonders and its opportunities."[135]

The positive impact of this unexpected help deeply impressed the lonely alien. Having braved the hardships of escape from Eastern Europe and the difficulties of the Atlantic passage, the new arrivals were grateful for the welcome offered by relatives and friends. Joseph Morgenstern recalled: "On Monday morning a relative of mine appeared at Ellis Island. For me he was nothing short of the Prophet Elijah come to release me from prison."[136]

Not all initial contacts, however, were so pleasant. Often the relative or friend would demand immediate Americanization of the newcomer. The socialization process seemed to

have to begin at once. Lucy Robins Lang recalled how, on
arrival in the United States, she was met by her father and
an old woman from her shtetl:

> From the folds of her shawls she pro-
> duced a bottle of castor oil, and ordered
> each of us to take a dose because we were
> greenhorns and must purge Europe from our
> systems. She also commanded us to pre-
> pare to go with her to the public baths,
> meanwhile impressing upon us that we must
> let her teach us how to behave in America.
> Without wasting any time, she announced
> our American names: Mother became Sarah,
> my sister became Beckie, the two boys were
> Willie and Sam, and I was Lizzie.[137]

The newcomers were often shocked by the speed with which
they were expected to adapt and fit in, but the influence of
the landsman or relative was crucial in determining the ease
with which the process of socialization took place. The immi-
grants were able to feel that their individual action and pre-
dicament were shared by others. People they knew had success-
fully adjusted to the foreign culture, and they would be helped
in their attempt. Marcus Ravage recalled, "I did not then, as
you see, come alone, [sic] to America. I came with the rest
of the population of Vaslui [in Rumania] . And Vaslui was
merely a sort of scouting-party, to be followed directly by
the main Army."[138]

The pain of separation from loved ones was lessened by
relatives and friends in the New World. The feeling of iso-
lation and marginality could be assuaged by the knowledge
that one's surroundings continued to be familiar. The Lower
East Side was not that different from shtetl Europe in terms

of extended family realtionships which offered emotional support and nurturing to a people in crisis.

1. Extension and Organization of the Support Systems

Personal contacts alone were not adequate agents of Americanization. The immigrant society soon recognized the need for organized effort to aid the newcomers and themselves. Established social patterns, formed through generations of European life, translated well into the new experiences of the United States. Support systems were established which more efficiently and completely eased the hardships of the Eastern European immigrant. The fact that the alien had migrated from a shtetl society which had social welfare systems in addition to the extended family proved crucial in determining the ease with which the Jews were able to adjust to America.

Himmelfarb noted that the immigrants ". . . carried in their baggage habits and ways of thinking that made it easy for them, without hierarchy or authority, to create an unbelievable number and variety of institutions, from synagogues and free-loan societies to home-town relief and family circles."[139]

Having had experiences with well developed communal institutions, the immigrant recognized the need for similar organizations in America. The new arrival quickly established the support systems which would, in many ways, replace or reinforce the family unit. Certain charitable institutions, which were intended to aid the immigrant, already existed in the United States. According to Handlin, however, the new ar-

rivals were ". . . often not content with the social and cul-
tural associations they discovered on arrival. Upon landing,
they usually set themselves the task of creating new ones."[140]

2. Group Identity through the Landsmanshaftn

Of all the institutions that served to aid the immigrants
in their struggles, none was more central to their lives than
the various landsmanshaftn. These were lodges whose membership
was composed of fellow townspeople from the different shtetls
in Europe. Irving Howe commented that it was "as if to re-
create in miniature the world from which they had fled [that]
the immigrant Jews established a remarkable network of socie-
ties called landsmanshaftn, probably the most spontaneous in
character of all their institutions, and the closest in voice
and spirit to the masses."[141] Feeling separated from and aban-
doned by the Old World, the immigrants were able to escape
their loneliness in the warmth of the lodges. The aliens felt
at home and accepted within the rooms of their clubs.

Morris Raphael Cohen remembered the verein of his shtetl
as an organization which helped its members adjust to the new
land and to its problems. But in more personal terms, he
wrote of ". . . the spiritual importance of the Neshwieser
Verein -- how it enabled the hardy pioneers to adjust them-
selves to the new land, to keep people in self-respect and
to make a home for the new generation; how the traditional
learning was a light -- . . . like the ancient candle or
torch -- which enabled people to interpret the new life."[142]
Cohen's feelings about his own verein were echoed by others.

These little organizations, composed of fellow townspeople
from the Old World, kept one in contact with one's past as
well as helped the new American fit into the new land.

Howe detailed the many functions of the landsmanshaftn:

> A member could assuage his nostalgia
> for the old country by listening to re-
> ports at the meetings from newly arrived
> immigrants or those who had gone back for
> a visit. He could share in the deeply
> rooted Jewish tradition of communal self-
> help, which in practice might mean send-
> ing money back home for Passover matzos
> or to repair the shul. The society would
> provide help for unemployed members, usu-
> ally in confidential ways, and once the
> wives started their ladies' auxiliary,
> this task was often turned over to them,
> as appropriate to their superior sense
> of delicacy.[143]

The landsmanshaftn were a substitute for the abandoned
shtetl family group. Responsibilities which would normally
have belonged to the father and mother were assumed by those
who found themselves together in the foreign land. Loans
were sought and received, employment was found, and potential
brides and grooms were brought together under the auspices of
these little communal societies. More importantly, the lands-
manshaftn and other extended family relationships served as
substitutes for the social foundations of shtetl society.
That there existed significant agents of socialization meant
that the Jews could rely on the cultural supports they had
always known in more stable environments. As a result, Risch-
in observed, the Jews were less subject to the social prob-
lems so prevalent about them.

However desperate the straits in which
Jewish immigrants found themselves, con-
firmed paupers among them were few. The
rarity of alcoholism, the pervasiveness
of the charitable impulse, the strength
of ties to family and lanslite [sic],
and a deep current of optimism preserved
the individual from such degradation.[144]

B. Support from the Community

The transition from shtetl to metropolis was made easier

because something of the former continued to exist in the lat-

ter. America was not completely foreign; similarities existed;

some continuity was maintained. This familiar environment,

however, was not always viewed with satisfaction by the immi-

grant. Morris Raphael Cohen was initially disappointed:

What I first saw of America did not come
up to the high expectation which popular ac-
counts of its unlimited wealth and radical
difference from the Old World had led me to
entertain. Almost all the people I met in
the street and in the stores, with the ex-
ception of some children, spoke Yiddish;
and though their dress had a somewhat dif-
ferent tone from the one to which I was ac-
customed, it did not seem much richer in
quality. Grand Street . . . did not seem
so much grander than the great mercantile
streets of Minsk, such as the Franciscaner.[145]

New York was, in many ways, a Jewish city. The immigrant

may have been overwhelmed by its size or by the noise and speed

of its daily life, yet it was not that strange or foreign when

compared to other urban centers of the Old World. Glazer and

Moynihan reported that by 1910 a million and a quarter Jews

lived in New York City, comprising one-fourth of the city's

population.[146] New York City was the immigrant's first home

in America, and it seemed familiar. Language, dress, employ-
ment, and fellow citizens all made the newly arrived Eastern
European Jew feel somewhat at home.

New York was not the only Jewish city. Each major Ameri-
can metropolis had its Jewish ghetto, and within those neigh-
borhoods, the Jews seemed at home. Lisitzky described his im-
pressions of Boston:

> To all outward appearances, my first
> days in Boston, when I was able to live
> as I had in Slutzk, were only a matter of
> change of locale: the synagogue where I
> prayed daily was always packed; . . . --
> Everything in Boston was just as it had
> been in Slutzk. But in Slutzk, the learn-
> ed and the pious had been in the vast ma-
> jority; so I felt like an alien in Boston.[147]

Even though one might be disillusioned, the overall effect
of the familiar served to help the immigrant adjust to that
which was foreign. The Jewish ghetto remained a relatively
safe home away from the cultural confrontations of the rest
of America.

1. Yiddish

Language is a vital component of individual identity.
While most of America spoke English, the Lower East Side Jews
could maintain their native tongue in social, business, and
educational relationships. Yiddish culture was a central in-
stitution in Lower East Side life. The Yiddish lecture hall
offered both education and escape from stifling tenements,
while the Yiddish theatre provided entertainment and enlight-
enment. The culture of Yiddishkeit, according to Irving Howe,

represented ". . . a way of life, a shared experience, which [went] beyond opinion or ideology."[148] Even those whose politics and cultural commitment seemed to preclude the socially inferior Yiddish fought for the language and the effort to maintain its place in Jewish culture. Cahan wrote:

> I loved Yiddish and often fought for it. I always talked simple Yiddish . . . . Even though some of my friends showed contempt for Yiddish, I defended it. I showed them how racy and powerful it could be and how it lent itself to the most beautiful, the most subtle and delicate thoughts. I felt at home with my Russian-speaking friends. But I felt a strong attraction to the Yiddish language, more than I had ever felt in Russia. Whenever I met a landsman whom I hadn't seen for some time, I would pounce upon him in Yiddish and draw great satisfaction from our conversation.[149]

2. The Yiddish Newspapers

A powerful force in the acculturation and socialization of the Jewish immigrants was the Jewish Daily Forward. Its editor, Abraham Cahan, translated his commitment to the Yiddish language into a major social institution of American Jewish life. In 1897, he founded the Jewish Daily Forward and became its first editor.[150] The Forward served as a profound force motivating the immigrant Jews and working towards their ultimate acculturation. Leon Stein wrote, "East Side Jews were a people moving from medieval life into the twentieth century. Cahan made the Forward a friend that could help them accomplish the transition."[151]

Others echoed Stein's sentiments. Hutchins Hapgood, in

The Spirit of the Ghetto, without naming the Forward in par-
ticular, stated, ". . . the Yiddish press, particularly the
Socialistic branch of it, is an educative element of great
value in the Ghetto. It has helped essentially to extend the
intellectual horizon of the Jew beyond the boundaries of the
Talmud, and has largely displaced the rabbi in the position
of teacher of the people."[152] The Forward's impact was remark-
able. At one time, the Forward was the largest circulation
Yiddish newspaper in America. Charney Vladeck, who was its
managing editor from 1918 to 1938, commented, "It lifted the
Jewish immigrant from the position of a slave and competitor
to the American working man, to the position of leader and
forerunner in the American Labor Movement."[153]

It was not only as a voice for socialism that the Forward
gained its readership. Through its section of letters, "A Bin-
tel Brief," it reacted with compassion to the hardships and
human conflicts of its readers. Its role of forum for the im-
migrants' She'eloth u-teshuvoth clearly reinforced Hapgood's
statement quoted above that the Forward displaced the rabbis
in their role as teachers and social arbiters.[154] The news-
paper took on its role of importance because Cahan was com-
mitted to fulfilling its potential as a molder of his society.
Nathan Glazer noted that "Cahan's primary interest . . . was
not socialism per se but the transforming of Jewish immigrants
into modern citizens."[155] Cahan, in most ways, succeeded in
his hope to use the Jewish Daily Forward as a central force
in the socialization process. The immigrants depended on the

Forward for support and education as they worked towards be-
coming Americanized.

3. Socialization by Example and Aid

The immigrants often found unexpected help from their more
assimilated brethren. The German Jews, more refined, educated,
assimilated than their Eastern European brothers, in many ways
helped their coreligionists to become Americans. Initial dis-
taste and disdain gave way to feelings of mutuality and accep-
tance. The rise of anti-Semitism, beginning in the 1870's,
was a major factor that led to a feeling of brotherhood among
Jews with differing backgrounds. Glazer and Moynihan wrote:

> Perhaps German Jews feared that, regard-
> less of what they thought and felt, non-Jews
> would identify them with the new immigrants.
> Whatever the reasons, they themselves sensed
> this identity. Out of a multitude of insti-
> tutions and organizations, a consciously sin-
> gle Jewish community was formed by the time
> of the First World War.[156]

The Eastern European Jew was able to identify with the
German Jews and thus with successful Americans who were simi-
lar to themselves. The immigrants had advocates fighting their
battles in the terrifying arenas of courts and hearing rooms.
That Jacob Schiff and Louis Marshall, as well as others, de-
monstrated genuine concern for the downtrodden aliens served
to add dignity and respectability to lives without other re-
inforcements of self-esteem. Irving Howe noted the reaction
to anti-Semitism and immigration restrictions that the German
Jews displayed. "That the Jews in America should respond at

first with anxiety, even hostility, is . . . not at all sur-
prising. What is remarkable is that the German Jews in America
soon began systematically to help the immigrant."[157]

It was not only the attacking forces of anti-Semitism from
without which drove the Germans and East Europeans together.
They both recognized that they were in fact coreligionists,
glaubensbrüder, and thus they were drawn together. European
social and cultural divisions quickly broke down in America.
That Jews were Jews was a sentiment shared by both Jews and
non-Jews. Handlin noted that unlike Europe where a rigid aris-
tocracy existed among the Jewish groups,

> . . . the free and fluid society in
> the United States did not tolerate the
> rigid lines of social division which
> alone could preserve the distinguishing
> characteristics. Subtly, unexpected af-
> flictions created ever more numerous
> points of contact; the calls of philan-
> thropy involved them one with another,
> the pull of Americanization drew them
> together, and the recognition of common
> obligations to overseas Jewry gave them
> shared interests. Meanwhile the larger
> American community, in which native,
> German, and east European Jews were
> alike fixed, thrust before them chal-
> lenges which they could only meet to-
> gether.[158]

That there existed on these shores a community of fellow
Jews who would ease the Americanization process meant to the
immigrants that the battle would not be fought alone. Through
acceptance by their more assimilated German cousins, the East-
ern Europeans were permitted all the emotional benefits of
group membership and identity confirmation.

4. Religious Continuity

As other communal institutions, uprooted from the Old
World, were transplanted into American soil, the central in-
stitution of shtetl life also found a home in the New World.
As was shown in the previous chapters, religious life had
permeated much of the daily existence of Eastern European
Jews. The demands of the American culture were often at odds
with traditional observance and ritual, yet the immigrants,
by modifying their expectations, were able to translate suc-
cessfully many of their old religious habits into their commu-
nal life in Jewish ghettos.

The Eastern European Jews rejected the existing religious
patterns and institutions which they initially found in Ameri-
ca. They wished to recreate the shtetl shuls, which had been
so comfortable and familiar, in their new home. In 1854 there
were only fourteen synagogues in New York; by 1890, the num-
ber had grown to 150. That number, in turn, doubled by 1900,
and, in 1942, there were 1200 synagogues in New York City.
"The result," said Handlin, "was a phenomenal multiplication
of synagogues."[159]

The proliferation of small synagogues, kosher butchers,
and heders added to an atmosphere that seemed familiar to the
uprooted wanderer. Jewish America was beginning to reflect
the social patterns of an Eastern European town, and the later
immigrant was not subject to the same cultural shocks which
predecessors may have experienced. Morris Raphael Cohen re-
membered:

> On the religious side there was at
> first much less difference than I had
> expected. All the people I knew . . .
> refrained from working on Saturdays, and
> all the stores in our immediate neighbor-
> hood were closed on that day. On Friday
> nights, on Saturdays and on holidays, I
> would accompany my father to a hall on
> Broome Street where the Neshwieser Ver-
> ein held religious services in the regu-
> lar Orthodox manner. . . . At these
> services on Broome Street, I found my-
> self in Neshwies again.[160]

Home life and immediate community served to reinforce
one's sense of belonging. Group identity could continue from
one culture to another as long as the immediate components of
one's society remained the same. Confusions and anxieties
existed, but they most often were a result of conflicts with
the "outside world." Within the home and in the immediate
community of the Jewish ghetto, cultural and social dislocation
were not as problematic. Religion and observance provided a
sense of identity that unified the disparate sectors of the
immigrant community. The Jew felt at home. Alfred Kazin re-
membered, "So it was: we had always to be together: be-
lievers and non-believers, we were a people; I was of that
people. Unthinkable to go one's own way, to doubt or to es-
cape the fact that I was a Jew."[161] The community thus acted
as a reinforcement to one's personal sense of identity. One
found a personal definition and confirmation in being a Jew
among others who shared one's beliefs and peoplehood.

C. Socialization through Employment

In addition to the home and neighborhood, the workplace

itself offered an environment of support. Earning a liveli-
hood in America required long hours of strenuous labor, and
so the workplace was an important factor in the life of the
worker. Often the demands of a job were at odds with the im-
migrant's aspirations and behavior, but, for many, factories
and pushcarts provided the companionship and friendship of
fellow workers. One's group identity could be formed within
sweatshops among workers, and on bustling commercial streets
with one's fellow peddlers. The immigrants found a sector
of society to which to belong in their primary contacts with
the world outside their own tenement apartments.

1. The Workers

In many ways, one's employment and trade offered some con-
tinuity between life in the Old World and life in the New. Mor-
ris Schappes noted, ". . . in Eastern Europe, the Jewish work-
ers were concentrated in clothing, metal-working, wood-working,
the building, textile and tobacco industries. These available
skills were much in demand by employers here. Therefore there
developed a continuity of occupation."[162] That continuity was
a valuable resource for the uprooted who had few external sup-
ports.

Light industry was ideally suited to the immigrant's abi-
lities and background. Rischin noted, "As mechanization rou-
tinized production, dexterity, speed, patience, and regular
habits became the prime work requisites. So endowed, under-
sized and underfed immigrants could compete without handicap."[163]

The Jews found themselves among other Jewish immigrants

sharing their work experiences. The Eastern European Jew
was easily integrated into specifically "Jewish " trades and
industries. A landsman would often meet the new arrivals at
the docks and offer them jobs. A verein would place its mem-
bers in the same industry. Just having the opportunity to
work for another Jew was significant to lonely isolated new-
comers. Moses Rischin noted:

> Jewish immigrants, separated by reli-
> gious prescriptions, customs, and language
> from the surrounding city, found a place
> in the clothing industry where the initial
> shock of contact with a bewildering world
> was tempered by a familiar milieu. Work,
> however arduous, did not forbid the per-
> formance of religious duties, the honor-
> ing of the Sabbath, and the celebration
> of religious festivals. Laboring in small
> units, immigrants could preserve the in-
> tegrity of their families.[164]

Joseph Morgenstern remembered his first job in a Jewish
cigar factory:

> Only Jews were employed at Brudno's.
> We were given Saturday off but worked on
> Sunday. All the employees were either
> members of his family or just plain lands-
> leit recommended by somebody in the family.
> There were a few young men who were or-
> dained rabbis and some "genteel" young men
> who in the old country had never done a
> lick of work. Here, having no other means
> of making a living, they became cigar work-
> ers. In the first place, it was clean
> work, and in the second place, sitting
> around the workbenches they could talk
> with each other, discuss Jewish problems
> and the problems of the world.[165]

The male society of the yeshivoth of Eastern Europe con-
tinued to exist in a more commercial environment in the United

States. What was significant was the feelings of belonging
that the often alienated immigrant was able to find in sweat-
shops and on workbenches.

In terms of culture shock, the immigrant was able to
feel a member of American society through labor. Positive
identity could be found in the industries of the Lower East
Side. As Handlin noted, ". . . both owners and employees were
Jews . . . . There was indeed no love lost between the 'Ger-
man' manufacturer and the 'Russian' proletarian; common reli-
gion, at first, actually heightened friction. But they could
at least talk with each other."[166] One might also assume that
the "German" boss served as a role model for the Eastern Euro-
pean Jew. As the former moved out of the Lower East Side, an
immigrant employee often took over the factory as a jobber
and would begin employing even more recent arrivals from East-
ern Europe.

2. Peddlers

Employment in manufacturing was not the only economic
sector open to the new Americans. Merchandising offered an
attractive alternative to sweatshop exploitation. Luftmenshn
from Eastern Europe easily found a home peddling in America.
The peddler was self-employed, and serving one's fellow ghetto
dwellers often meant being protected from confrontations with
outside employers and non-Jewish fellow workers. The peddler
was independent. Rischin stated, "The peddler's pack still
provided the most direct introduction to American ways, the
most promising school for the study of the country's speech,

tastes and economic needs, and the broadest field for the play of the aspiring tradesman's imagination."[167] The peddler quickly learned how to fit into American life. Successful socialization became a necessity.

Joshua Levinson, in his unpublished autobiography, recalled his first peddling experience. He entered a tavern in order to sell sweaters. He approached the bartender and showed him the most expensive sweater of the lot. The customer asked how much, and Levinson quoted three dollars. "Too thin," said the bartender and picked out a heavier sweater. The bartender asked the seller the price of the heavier one. "Thinking I might lose the sale all together, if I told him that,,[sic] that was a cheaper sweater, so shaking with fear, I told him $4. 'That is the stuff' he said, and immediately gave me $4."[168]

Through peddling, Levinson and others were able to learn American habits and customs. Their confusion or shock was quickly mitigated when they realized that their own adaptation to the new society meant their economic success.

Peddling was also a significant force in the acculturation process due to the large community of fellow merchants to which the hucksters belonged. The pushcart entrepreneurs were members of a larger group of other Jews who began their businesses in a similar manner and represented a sub-society of Lower East Side "petite bourgeoisie." The Jewish peddlers identified with each other and represented a supportive community. Marcus Ravage recalled his own initial foray into the marketplace:

Toward nine o'clock the whole army of

> peddlers came forth into the daylight,
> and the winter air grew suddenly warm
> with friendly babbling and mutual of-
> ferings of assistance. The mere sight
> of them, with their variegated equipages
> and their motley goods, was reassuring
> . . . . It seemed to me, as I looked
> out upon this vast itinerant commerce,
> . . . that I was no mere detached traf-
> ficker engaged in a despised trade. I
> was a member of a great and honored mer-
> cantile guild.[169]

The pushcart acted as a vehicle towards Americanization
easing the acculturation process and offering a foothold in
the new land.

3. Unions

One other activity contributed to the immigrant's accul-
turation. Out of the labor experience and in reaction to the
injustices of sweatshops, powerful Jewish labor organizations
were formed. These unions often served as agents of Ameri-
canization. Through the unions, the immigrant laborers were
organized in political and social terms. Handlin noted:

> Like the other associational activities
> of the Jewish community, the unions were
> the means through which the immigrants ad-
> justed to the conditions of the new society.
> Like the synagogues and lodges, they eased
> the adaptation to life in America. Through
> these myriad organizations, the newcomer
> learned comfortably how to get along in the
> United States without the shock of raw ex-
> posure to a completely alien universe.[170]

The unions organized the Jews into a cohesive community.
They provided their members with educational and social out-
lets after a day's work. The worker was able to know the se-

curity inherent in group membership and mutual confirmation.
The immigrants were recognized members of a Jewish working
class which helped the workers to define themselves in terms
of group membership and identity.

D.   Education

The immigrants were aided in their acculturation attempts
by their fellow Jews, their landsmen, who showed them the way
and taught them how to be good Americans. Activities outside
the home also helped in the socialization effort. Sweatshop
comrades or fellow peddlers taught the less experienced work-
ers how to cease being "greenhorns" and find the road to suc-
cess.   The new Americans, however, needed a more concrete
skill before they could fully identify as citizens of the
United States.   They wanted to learn English and share in the
rights of free public education.

1.   Opportunities

In many cases, the immigrants were too busy to learn
English in any formal way. Working long hours and trying to
maintain a family often precluded the luxuries of night school
or citizenship classes. Nathan Kushin recalled his own unor-
thodox methods of self-education. He tried to read all the
billboards and signs which he saw around him, and he talked
as much as possible with his fellow cigar workers. His most
unusual method, however, was indulged in on Sunday mornings
when he was free from work.

> . . . I would walk over to any church
> on Broad Street [Philadelphia], not to
> pray, but to listen to the sermon and thus
> add a few words to my vocabulary. . . .
> Sometimes I wonder what the ushers thought
> when they saw a shabbily-dressed Jewish
> boy walk in to listen to the sermon and
> leave before the collection plates were
> passed around. I tried not to visit the
> same church twice, afraid of being ex-
> pelled.[171]

Other Jewish immigrants pursued more traditional patterns
of education. Benjamin Antin was similar to thousands of oth-
ers who would attend night school after a long day of diffi-
cult labor. No matter how tiring the work might be, the mo-
tivation to get an American education overcame the hardships
involved. Antin noted, "Study! That was the big thing. Stu-
dy one's way out of the tenement."[172]

2. Conflicts

Not all newcomers had the opportunity to partake of the
promised American feast. Some were forced to deny themselves
in order to provide for a better life for the younger family
members. Lucy Robins Lang was the oldest child in her family
so the responsibility of the home rested on her shoulders. It
was her younger sister who was given the chance to go to school.
Her younger sister could thus move quickly and with less pain
adjust to the new homeland. Lang looked back to that experi-
ence with anger and pain:

> More and more I began to resent the
> fact that I had not been able to go to
> school. My younger sister, who was at-
> tending school, spoke English almost all

the time, and that meant that she was
rising out of the squalor of immigrant
life. . . . I suffered because of my
ignorance.[173]

The older children were forced to stay at home or had to
find jobs and help support the family. They were denied the
promised opportunities of American life. Their younger brothers
and sisters eventually educated them, but the resentment which
they felt at not being quite as "American" remained with them.

E. Parents and Children

The attempt to achieve acculturation not only had its ef-
fects on the immigrants themselves but also on their children.
It was actually the children who were assimilated most effec-
tively into American life, and it was perhaps the resulting
cultural conflicts between the children and their parents which
was the furthest-reaching influence and cause for personal ten-
sion of the immigration movement. For example, sibling rival-
ries, described in the previous section, were not the only dam-
aging results of unequal educational opportunities. The chil-
dren became Americans, while the parents continued to be East-
ern European immigrants. The older generation was forced to
work in order to insure a future for their children. The sons
and daughters came home speaking English, while fathers and
mothers remained tied to Yiddish. The immigrants' claim to
American identity was found only through their children's suc-
cessful acculturation. Mary Antin wrote, ". . . by the simple
act of delivering our school certificates . . . our father
took possession of America."[174] That initial claim to demo-

cracy's treasure meant acceptance and citizenship to immigrants
who had arrived in the New World without rights or expectations
of success.

Sarah Reznikoff, the mother of Charles Reznikoff, the
poet, wrote in her own autobiography of the powerful emotions
that the oder generation felt when they saw the opportunities
available to their children:

> One day, one of our cousins who had
> just come from Russia, was in our house;
> and when it was nearly three o'clock, we
> went to meet Charles and Paul. All the
> children came running out of school --
> so many of them -- and his eyes filled
> with tears. I remembered how I, too,
> had longed for an education. "We are
> a lost generation," I said. "It is for
> our children to do what they can."[175]

1. Alienation and Rejection

In harsher terms, education of the young meant the end of
a way of life for the inhabitants of the Lower East Side. As
the immigrants watched their children on the way to public
school, or, in later years, to the City College of New York,
the struggling laborers recognized the widening gulf between
themselves and their children. Their own foreign identity
came into conflict with the new generation's Americanism.
Weinryb noted America's destructive force: "The general
school, the general press, the street, and political life
work in one direction -- they all tend to alienate the immi-
grant from his own cultural background and they also serve to
create a gulf between the immigrant and his children."[176]

The tragedy of the parents engendered by the success of
the young is a recurrent theme in the writings of the immi-
grants and their children. In his Memoirs of a New American,
Nathan Kushin echoed Weinryb's statement.

> The real tragedy of the older immi-
> grant was losing his hold on the young-
> er children. Growing up on the streets,
> and learning the language in this man-
> ner, they were ashamed of their "greenie"
> parents, for whom they lost all respect
> and reverence. No matter how wise their
> parents were, they could not speak Eng-
> lish.[177]

The rejection of the old by the young proved painful to
the immigrants whose own childhood, at least in hindsight, was
lived with respect and honor for the older generation. Ameri-
canized youth abandoned their parents. Marcus Ravage noted
the confusion of the immigrants in their reaction to this phe-
nomenon.

> The younger folk, in particular, had
> undergone an intolerable metamorphosis.
> As they succeeded in picking up English
> more speedily than their elders, they as-
> sumed a defiant attitude toward their
> parents, which the latter found them-
> selves impotent to restrain and, in too
> many cases, secretly approved as a step
> toward the emancipation of their off-
> spring.[178]

2. Social Mobility and Escape

In political terms, as well, the immigrant's life-style
and values were rejected by the children. While the unions
and socialist meetings were central organizations in the older

generation's life, new economic and social possibilities re-
moved the next generation from that culture. Habush noted how
"the upward mobility of American Jews . . . ultimately wrote the
epitaph of the radical Jewish labor movement."[179] What was once
central in the parents' lives became, for the children, only some-
thing from which to escape. Community loyalty and social respon-
sibility were not always as powerful a force in the lives of the
young as they had been among the parents. Anzia Yezierska wrote,
"Once you knew what poor people suffered it kept gnawing at you.
You'd been there yourself. You wanted to reach out and help.
But if you did, you were afraid you might be dragged back into
the abyss."[180]

The immigrant generation did not always object to the
Another example of the rush to escape was presented by
Alfred Kazin in his book, New York Jew. He recalled how he and
his wife were twenty-three years old and had known each other
for only two weeks prior to their marriage. He ascribed the
cause of their need to be married so quickly to the fact that
". . . we were both in a terrible rush to get away from every-
thing we had grown up with."[181]

The immigrant generation did not always object to the
flight of the young. They too had abandoned their parents in
Eastern European shtetls in order to seek success in the New
World. They felt alone when the children moved out of the
Lower East Side ghettos, but that did not obliterate the satis-
faction and sense of achievement which the children represented.
The ultimate Americanization of the young proved destructive
to the family unit, but the ability of the younger generation

to acculturate reflected honor on the parents. Kazin wrote that his parents ". . . looked on themselves only as instruments toward the ideal 'American' future that would be lived by their children."[182] It was not unusual for the parents to live vicariously through their children. The elders became Americans because they were parents of Americans.

3. Role Reversal

The children were able to adapt to their new home. They identified with the people of the United States and with its history, culture, and values. Through the schools, in particular, the children of the immigrants became full citizens of the new homeland. Mary Antin wrote of her gratitude. "The public school has done its best for us foreigners, and for the country, when it has made us into good Americans."[183] As the children became Americanized, the parents, as well, began to change. Albert Gordon noted:

> The customs as well as the dress of these people began to show a marked change when their children started to go to public school. Through the children parents became aware of the differences and changes resulted. Beards began to disappear. Old-fashioned garb was discarded in favor of American made and styled clothes. The younger girls, upon their marriage, never put on the traditional sheitel, and parents did not object. Only within the confines of the home were the traditional and religious rites retained.[184]

The effects of the parents' learning and adapting from the children were profound. The normal generational relation-

ships were often reversed. The children supplanted their own

parents as primary breadwinners and heads of households. Hutch-

ins Hapgood noted this trend in the relationships of fathers

and sons.

> An important circumstance in helping to
> determine the boy's attitude toward his fa-
> ther is the tendency to reverse the ordinary
> and normal educational and economical rela-
> tion existing between father and son. In
> Russia the father gives the son an education
> tion and supports him until his marriage,
> and often afterward, until the young man is
> able to take care of his wife and children.
> The father is, therefore, the head of the
> house in reality. But in the New World the
> boy contributes very early to the family's
> support. The father is in this country
> less able to make an economic place for him-
> self than is the son . . . . As he speaks
> English, and his parents do not, he is com-
> monly the interpreter in business transac-
> tions, and tends generally to take things
> into his own hands. There is a tendency,
> therefore, for the father to respect the
> son."[185]

Erikson, at a much later date, noted the same phenomenon.

In Childhood and Society, he reported that ". . . the psycho-

analysis of the children of immigrants clearly reveals to what

extent they, as the first real Americans in their family, be-

come their parents' cultural parents."[186] Philip Slater, how-

ever, saw this parent-child role reversal as a common American

social pattern. Rather than noting the cultural shock inher-

ent in what seemed most unusual behavior, Slater wrote of the

totally American nature of the problem.

> . . . this experience of the immigrant
> is not a foreigner's experience but an
> American experience. There has never been

a time when a child was not better
adapted than his or her parents to
live in American society, when he or
she was not the bearer of aspirations
for a better future. What the immi-
grant imagined to be a problem pecu-
liar to being foreign was really an
ironic initiation into American life.[187]

This new initiation into American cultural patterns was
no more difficult than other cultural reevaluations which the
immigrant experienced. The new American was motivated by an
overwhelming desire to be a fully accepted member of the new
society. The Eastern European Jew wanted to become a total
American. One method of doing so was to learn from more adapt-
able children, and the immigrant was willing.

Conclusion

The immigrant to America was able to acculturate with con-
siderable success. The process took time, and the new Ameri-
can experienced failures along the way. Eventually, however,
the Eastern European Jew found a home in the United States.
The immigrant Jews displayed internal strengths and abilities
which made the adaptation to America easier, and the new arri-
val was aided in the socialization process by support systems
which proved crucial in determining eventual success. The
"greenhorn" was encouraged by relatives who had landed on these
shores a few years earlier. The landsmanshaftn also helped
the newcomer to adjust. Jewish life in the ghetto seemed fa-
miliar, and the workplace also played its role in educating
the alien. America itself opened its doors, and the immigrants
became members of its society. One ceased to be an Eastern

European _shtetl_ Jew and became, instead, an American Jew of
Eastern European background.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis the journey of the Eastern European Jew-
ish immigrants has been traced from their origins in the Old
World to their newly-adopted homeland in the United States.
I have tried to describe and analyze the environment of the
Eastern European shtetl as a prerequisite for an understanding
of the Jewish identity prior to immigration. I have also ex-
plored the reasons and motivations for the individual decisions
to emigrate. Similarly, life in America was studied in terms
of those forces and influences which served to aid or hinder
the immigrant in the acculturation process. Emphasis was
placed on specific aspects of social and personal relation-
ships, including family structure, religious rituals and be-
liefs, and employment and educational opportunities. Those
forces which helped to shape the immigrant's identity, both
in Europe and America, were discussed and analyzed.

This thesis has, however, approached the subject of Jew-
ish immigration from the particular focus of psychological
studies of identity formation and the personal impact of the
social and cultural environment. The immigrants experienced
profound personal losses as well as unique opportunities for
freedom and individual growth and development. The culture
in which identity was formed was abandoned, but the New World
offered new possibilities for personality change and defini-
tion. The question, therefore, has been raised of the appli-
cability of general psychological and sociological studies

of personality in society to the specific case of the Jewish
immigrant.

In attempting to understand the immigration process in
these terms, I have studied the individuals who participated
in this movement. Primarily through their own writings and
observations, I have hoped to depict their reactions to and
insights into the forces and events which were part of their
immigration experiences. In addition to descriptions of events,
I have searched, in particular, for those memoirs which demon-
strated an analysis of the effects of those occurrences on the
formation of the individual's psychological makeup. Not every
writer chose to probe the emotional components of their his-
torical experiences, but those who did added to an understand-
ing of the profound impact that a radical change of culture
and social milieu had on individual lives.

The relevance of the psychological studies of personal
identity to the analysis of the immigration process has thus
been demonstrated and supported through the recollections of
the immigrants themselves. What others have written concern-
ing the formation of personality in society -- the factors in-
fluencing growth and development, the need for support systems
in family and society, and the disruptive effects of aliena-
tion and rejection -- can be used to describe and understand
the experiences of the Jewish wanderers between the years 1880
and 1920. It therefore seems possible to conclude that the
attempt to relate general psychological and sociological stud-
ies to the Jewish immigration experience has been supported in

the secondary historical studies as well as the personal mem-
oirs of the immigrants themselves. This particular phase of
Jewish social history can thus be better understood through
the application of a general methodological approach.

The immigrant Jews moved from one society to another.
Their eventual goal was acculturation into the new homeland.
Only by understanding their original environment, their own
personalities, and the positive and negative forces which
awaited them in the New World can the scholar hope to compre-
hend the nature of the acculturation process. I hope to have
added, through this thesis, to that understanding.

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181. Alfred Kazin, New York Jew, p. 4.

182. Kazin, Walker in the City, p. 56.

183. M. Antin, p. 222.

184. A. I. Gordon, p. 22.

185. Hapgood, pp. 27-28.

186. Erikson, Childhood and Society, p. 294.

187. Slater, p. 62.

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